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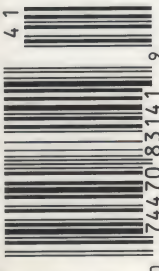
CRANK!

SCIENCE FICTION • FANTASY

BRIAN ALDISS

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CRANK!

SCIENCE FICTION – FANTASY

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CONTENTS

The Matter of Seggri • 3 • Ursula K. Le Guin

The Names of Yanils • 37 • Chan Davis

Mood Bender • 55 • Jonathan Lethem

Planet Virt • 71 • Katherine MacLean

The Servant Problem • 74 • Brian Aldiss

Bryan Cholfín • Editor

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The Matter of Seggri

Ursula K. Le Guin

THE first recorded contact with Seggri was in year 242 of Hainish Cycle 93. A Wandership six generations out from Iao (4-Taurus) came down on the planet, and the captain entered this report in his ship's log.

Captain Aolao-olao's Report

We have spent near forty days on this world they call Se-ri or Ye-ha-ri, well entertained, and leave with as good an estimation of the natives as is consonant with their unregenerate state. They live in fine great buildings they call castles, with large parks all about. Outside the walls of the parks lie well-tilled fields and abundant orchards, reclaimed by diligence from the parched and arid desert of stone that makes up the greatest part of the land. Their women live in villages and towns huddled outside the walls. All the common work of farm and mill is performed by the women, of whom there is a vast superabundance. They are ordinary drudges, living in towns which belong to the lords of the castle. They live amongst the cattle and brute animals of all kinds, who are permitted into the houses, some of which are of fair size. These women go about drably clothed, always in groups and bands. They are never allowed within the walls of the park, leaving the food and necessities with which they provide the men at the outer gate of the castle. The women evinced great fear and distrust of us, and our hosts advised us that it were best for us to keep away from their towns, which we did.

The men go freely about their great parks, playing at one sport or another. At night they go to certain houses which they own in the town, where they may have their pick among the women and satisfy their lust upon them as they will. The women pay them, we were told, in their

money, which is copper, for a night of pleasure, and pay them yet more if they get a child on them. Their nights thus are spent in carnal satisfaction as often as they desire, and their days in a diversity of sports and games, notably a kind of wrestling, in which they throw each other through the air so that we marvelled that they seemed never to take hurt, but rose up and returned to the combat with marvelous dexterity of hand and foot. Also they fence with blunt swords, and combat with long light sticks. Also they play a game with balls on a great field, using the arms to catch or throw the ball and the legs to kick the ball and trip or catch or kick the men of the other team, so that many are bruised and lamed in the passion of the sport, which was very fine to see, the teams in their contrasted garments of bright colors much gauded out with gold and finery seething now this way, now that, up and down the field in a mass, from which the balls were flung up and caught by runners breaking free of the struggling crowd and fleeing towards the one or the other goal with all the rest in hot pursuit. There is a "battlefield" as they call it of this game lying without the walls of the castle park, near to the town, so that the women may come watch and cheer, which they do heartily, calling out the names of favorite players and urging them with many uncouth cries to victory.

Boys are taken from the women at the age of eleven and brought to the castle to be educated as befits a man. We saw such a child brought into the castle with much ceremony and rejoicing. It is said that the women find it difficult to bring a pregnancy of a boy child to term, and that of those born many die in infancy despite the care lavished upon them, so that there are far more women than men. In this we see the curse of GOD laid upon this race as upon all those who acknowledge HIM not, unrepentant heathens whose ears are stopped to true discourse and blind to the light.

These men know little of art, only a kind of leaping dance, and their science is little beyond that of savages. One great man of a castle to whom I talked, who was dressed out in cloth of gold and crimson and whom all called Prince and Grandsire with much respect and deference, yet was so ignorant he believed the stars to be worlds full of people and beasts, asking us from which star we descended. They have only vessels driven by steam along the surface of the land and water, and no notion of flight either in the air or in space, nor any curiosity about such things, saying with disdain, "That is all women's work," and indeed I found that if I asked these great men about matters of common knowledge such as the working of machinery, the weaving of cloth, the transmission of holovision, they would soon chide me for taking interest in womanish things as they called them, desiring me to talk as befit a man.

In the breeding of their fierce cattle within the parks they are very knowledgeable, as in the sewing up of their clothing, which they make from cloth the women weave in their factories. The men vie in the ornamentation and magnificence of their costumes to an extent which we might indeed have thought scarcely manly, were they not withal such proper men, strong and ready for any game or sport, and full of pride and a most delicate and fiery honor.

The log including Captain Aolao-olao's entries was (after a 12-generation journey) returned to the Sacred Archives of The Universe on Iao, which were dispersed during the period called The Tumult, and eventually preserved in fragmentary form on Hain. There is no record of further contact with Seggri until the First Observers were sent by the Ekumen in 93/1333: an Alterran man and a Hainish woman, Kaza Agad and Merriment. After a year in orbit mapping, photographing, recording and studying broadcasts, and analysing and learning a major regional language, the Observers landed. Acting upon a strong persuasion of the vulnerability of the planetary culture, they presented themselves as survivors of the wreck of a fishing boat, blown far off course, from a remote island. They were, as they had anticipated, separated at once, Kaza Agad being taken to the Castle and Merriment into the town. Kaza kept his name, which was plausible in the native context; Merriment called herself Yude. We have only her report, from which three excerpts follow.

From Mobile Gerindu'uttahayudetwe'menrade Merriment's Notes for a Report to the Ekumen, 93/1334.

34/223. Their network of trade and information, hence their awareness of what goes on elsewhere in their world, is too sophisticated for me to maintain my Stupid Foreign Castaway act any longer. Ekhaw called me in today and said, "If we had a sire here who was worth buying or if our teams were winning their games, I'd think you were a spy. Who are you, anyhow?"

I said, "Would you let me go to the College at Hagka?"

She said, "Why?"

"There are scientists there, I think? I need to talk with them."

This made sense to her; she made their "Mh" noise of assent.

"Could my friend go there with me?"

"Shask, you mean?"

We were both puzzled for a moment. She didn't expect a woman to call a man 'friend,' and I hadn't thought of Shask as a friend. She's very young, and I haven't taken her very seriously.

"I mean Kaza, the man I came with."

"A man – to the college?" she said, incredulous. She looked at me and said, "Where *do* you come from?"

It was a fair question, not asked in enmity or challenge. I wish I could have answered it, but I am increasingly convinced that we can do great damage to these people; we are facing Resehavananar's Choice here, I fear.

Ekhaw paid for my journey to Hagka, and Shask came along with me. As I thought about it I saw that of course Shask was my friend. It was she who brought me into the motherhouse, persuading Ekhaw and Azman of their duty to be hospitable; it was she who had looked out for me all along. Only she was so conventional in everything she did and said that I hadn't realised how radical her compassion was. When I tried to thank her, as our little jitney-bus purred along the road to Hagka, she said things like she always says – "Oh, we're all family," and "People have to help each other" and "Nobody can live alone."

"Don't women ever live alone?" I asked her, for all the ones I've met belong to a motherhouse or a daughterhouse, whether a couple or a big family like Ekhaw's, which is three generations: five older women, three of their daughters living at home, and four children – the boy they all coddle and spoil so, and three girls.

"Oh yes," Shask said. "If they don't want wives, they can be single-women. And old women, when their wives die, sometimes they just live alone till they die. Usually they go live at a daughterhouse. In the colleges, the *vev* always have a place to be alone." Conventional she may be, but Shask always tries to answer a question seriously and completely; she thinks about her answer. She has been an invaluable informant. She has also made life easy for me by not asking questions about where I come from. I took this for the incuriosity of a person securely embedded in an unquestioned way of life, and for the self-centeredness of the young. Now I see it as delicacy.

"A *vev* is a teacher?"

"Mh."

"And the teachers at the college are very respected?"

"That's what *vev* means. That's why we call Eckaw's mother *Vev Kakaw*. She didn't go to college, but she's a thoughtful person, she's learned from life, she has a lot to teach us."

So respect and teaching are the same thing, and the only term of respect I've heard women use for women means teacher. And so in teaching me, young Shask respects herself? And/or earns my respect? This casts a different light on what I've been seeing as a society in which wealth is the important thing. Zadedr, the current mayor of Reha, is certainly admired for her

very ostentatious display of possessions; but they don't call her Vev.

I said to Shask, "You have taught me so much, may I call you Vev Shask?"

She was equally embarrassed and pleased, and squirmed and said, "Oh no no no no." Then she said, "If you ever come back to Reha I would like very much to have love with you, Yude."

"I thought you were in love with Sire Zadr!" I blurted out.

"Oh, I am," she said, with that eye-roll and melted look they have when they speak of the Sires, "aren't you? Just think of him fucking you, oh! Oh, I get all wet thinking about it!" She smiled and wriggled. I felt embarrassed in my turn and probably showed it. "Don't you like him?" she inquired with a naivety I found hard to bear. She was acting like a silly adolescent, and I know she's not a silly adolescent. "But I'll never be able to afford him," she said, and sighed.

So you want to make do with me, I thought, nastily.

"I'm going to save my money," she announced after a minute. "I think I want to have a baby next year. Of course I can't afford Sire Zadr, he's a Great Champion, but if I don't go to the Games at Kadaki this year I can save up enough for a really good sire at our fuckery, maybe Master Rosra. I wish, I know this is silly, I'm going to say it anyway, I kept wishing you could be its lovemother. I know you can't, you have to go to the college. I just wanted to tell you. I love you." She took my hands, drew them to her face, pressed my palms on her eyes for a moment, and then released me. She was smiling, but her tears were on my hands.

"Oh, Shask," I said, floored.

"It's all right!" she said. "I have to cry a minute." And she did. She wept openly, bending over, wringing her hands, and wailing softly. I patted her arm and felt unutterably ashamed of myself. Other passengers looked round and made little sympathetic grunting noises. One old woman said, "That's it, that's right, lovey!" In a few minutes Shask stopped crying, wiped her nose and face on her sleeve, drew a long, deep breath, and said, "All right." She smiled at me. "Driver," she called, "I have to piss, can we stop?"

The driver, a tense-looking woman, growled something, but stopped the bus on the wide, weedy roadside; and Shask and another woman got off and pissed in the weeds. There is an enviable simplicity to many acts in a society which has, in all its daily life, only one gender. And which, perhaps – I don't know this but it occurred to me then, while I was ashamed of myself – has no shame?

34/245. (Dictated) Still nothing from Kaza. I think I was right to give him the ansible. I hope he's in touch with somebody. I wish it was me. I need to

know what goes on in the Castles.

Anyhow I understand better now what I was seeing at the Games in Reha. There are 16 adult women for every adult man. One conception in six or so is male, but a lot of nonviable male fetuses and defective male births bring it down to 1 in 16 by puberty. My ancestors must have really had fun playing with these people's chromosomes. I feel guilty, even if it was a million years ago. I have to learn to do without shame but had better not forget the one good use of guilt. Anyhow. A fairly small town like Reha shares its Castle with other towns. That confusing spectacle I was taken to on my tenth day down was Awaga Castle trying to keep its place in the Maingame against a castle from up north, and losing. Which means Awaga's team can't play in the big game this year in Fadrga, the city south of here, from which the winners go on to compete in the *big big* game at Zask, where people come from all over the continent – hundreds of contestants and thousands of spectators. I saw some holos of last year's Main-game at Zask. There were 1280 players, the comment said, and 40 balls in play. It looked to me like a total mess, my idea of a battle between two unarmed armies, but I gather that great skill and strategy is involved. All the members of the winning team get a special title for the year, and another one for life, and bring glory back to their various Castles and the towns that support them.

I can now get some sense of how this works, see the system from outside it, because the college doesn't support a Castle. People here aren't obsessed with sports and athletes and sexy sires the way the young women in Reha were, and some of the older ones. It's a kind of obligatory obsession. Cheer your team, support your brave men, adore your local hero. It makes sense. Given their situation, they need strong, healthy men at their fuckery; it's social selection reinforcing natural selection. But I'm glad to get away from the rah-rah and the swooning and the posters of fellows with swelling muscles and huge penises and bedroom eyes.

I have made Resehavanar's Choice. I chose the option: Less than the truth. Shoggrad and Skodr and the other teachers, professors we'd call them, are intelligent, enlightened people, perfectly capable of understanding the concept of space travel, etc., making decisions about technological innovation, etc. I limit my answers to their questions to technology. I let them assume, as most people naturally assume, particularly people from a monoculture, that our society is pretty much like theirs. When they find how it differs, the effect will be revolutionary, and I have no mandate, reason, or wish to cause such a revolution on Seggri.

Their gender imbalance has produced a society in which, as far as I can

tell, the men have all the privilege and the women have all the power. It's obviously a stable arrangement. According to their histories, it's lasted at least two millennia, and probably in some form or another much longer than that. But it could be quickly and disastrously destabilised by contact with us, by their experiencing the human norm. I don't know if the men would cling to their privileged status or demand freedom, but surely the women would resist giving up their power, and their sexual system and affectional relationships would break down. Even if they learned to undo the genetic program that was inflicted on them, it would take several generations to restore normal gender distribution. I can't be the whisper that starts that avalanche.

34/266. (Dictated) Skodr got nowhere with the men of Awaga Castle. She had to make her inquiries very cautiously, since it would endanger Kaza if she told them he was an alien or in any way unique. They'd take it as a claim of superiority, which he'd have to defend in trials of strength and skill. I gather that the hierarchies within the Castles are a rigid framework, within which a man moves up or down issuing challenges and winning or losing obligatory and optional trials. The sports and games the women watch are only the showpieces of an endless series of competitions going on inside the Castles. As an untrained, grown man Kaza would be at a total disadvantage in such trials. The only way he might get out of them, she said, would be by feigning illness or idiocy. She thinks he must have done so, since he is at least alive; but that's all she could find out – "The man who was cast away at Taha-Reha is alive."

Although the women feed, house, clothe, and support the Lords of the Castle, they evidently take their noncooperation for granted. She seemed glad to get even that scrap of information. As I am.

But we have to get Kaza out of there. The more I hear about it from Skodr the more dangerous it sounds. I keep thinking "spoiled brats!" but actually these men must be more like soldiers in the training camps that militarists have. Only the training never ends. As they win trials they gain all kinds of titles and ranks you could translate as "generals" and the other names militarists have for all their power-grades. Some of the "generals," the Lords and Masters and so on, are the sports idols, the darlings of the fuckeries, like the one poor Shask adored; but as they get older apparently they often trade glory among the women for power among the men, and become tyrants within their Castle, bossing the "lesser" men around, until they're overthrown, kicked out. Old sires often live alone, it seems, in little houses away from the main Castle, and are considered crazy and danger-

ous – rogue males.

It sounds like a miserable life. All they're allowed to do after age eleven is compete at games and sports inside the Castle, and compete in the fuckeries, after they're fifteen or so, for money and number of fucks and so on. Nothing else. No options. No trades. No skills of making. No travel unless they play in the big games. They aren't allowed into the colleges to gain any kind of freedom of mind. I asked Skodr why an intelligent man couldn't at least come study in the college, and she told me that learning was very bad for men: it weakens a man's sense of honor, makes his muscles flabby, and leaves him impotent. "What goes to the brain takes from the testicles," she said. "Men have to be sheltered from education for their own good."

I tried to "be water," as I was taught, but I was disgusted. Probably she felt it, because after a while she told me about "the secret college." Some women in colleges do smuggle information to men in Castles. The poor things meet secretly and teach each other. In the Castles, homosexual relationships are encouraged among boys under fifteen, but not officially tolerated among grown men; she says the "secret colleges" often are run by the homosexual men. They have to be secret because if they're caught reading or talking about ideas they may be punished by their Lords and Masters. There have been some interesting works from the "secret colleges," Skodr said, but she had to think to come with examples. One was a man who had smuggled out an interesting mathematical theorem, and one was a painter whose landscapes, though primitive in technique, were admired by professionals of the art. She couldn't remember his name.

Arts, sciences, all learning, all professional techniques, are *haggyad*, skilled work. They're all taught at the colleges, and there are no divisions and few specialists. Teachers and students cross and mix fields all the time, and being a famous scholar in one field doesn't keep you from being a student in another. Skodr is a vev of physiology, writes plays, and is currently studying history with one of the history vevs. Her thinking is informed and lively and fearless. My School on Hain could learn from this college. It's a wonderful place, full of free minds. But only minds of one gender. A hedged freedom.

I hope Kaza has found a secret college or something, some way to fit in at the Castle. He's very fit, but these men have trained for years for the games they play. And a lot of the games are violent. The women say don't worry, we don't let the men kill each other, we protect them, they're our treasures. But I've seen men carried off with concussions on the holos of their martial-art fights, where they throw each other around spectacularly.

"Only inexperienced fighters get hurt." Very reassuring. And they wrestle bulls. And in that melee they call the Maingame they break each other's legs and ankles deliberately. "What's a hero without a limp?" the women say. Maybe that's the safe thing to do, get your leg broken so you don't have to prove you're a hero any more. But what else might Kaza have to prove?

I asked Shask to let me know if she ever heard of him being at the Reha fuckery. But Awaga Castle services (that's their word, the same word they use for their bulls) four towns, so he might get sent to one of the others. But probably not, because men who don't win at things aren't allowed to go to the fuckeries. Only the champions. And boys between fifteen and nineteen, the ones the older women call *dippida*, baby animals, like puppies or kitties or lambies. They like to use the *dippida* for pleasure, and the champions when they go to the fuckery to get pregnant. But Kaza's thirty-six, he isn't a puppy or a kitten or a lamb. He's a man, and this is a terrible place to be a man.

Kaza Agad had been killed; the Lords of Awaga Castle finally disclosed the fact, but not the circumstances. A year later, Merriment radioed her lander and left Seggri for Hain. Her recommendation was to observe and avoid. The Stabiles, however, decided to send another pair of observers; these were both women, Mobiles Alee Iyoo and Zerín Wu. They lived for eight years on Seggri, after the third year as First Mobiles; Iyoo stayed as Ambassador another fifteen years. They made Resehavanar's Choice as "all the truth slowly." A limit of 200 visitors from off-world was set. During the next several generations the people of Seggri, becoming accustomed to the alien presence, considered their own options as members of the Ekumen. Proposals for a planetwide referendum on genetic alteration were abandoned, since the men's vote would be insignificant unless the women's vote were handicapped. As of the date of this report the Seggri have not undertaken major genetic alteration, though they have learned and applied various repair techniques, which have resulted in a higher proportion of full-term male infants; the gender balance now stands at about 12:1.

The following is a memoir given to Ambassador Eritho te Ves in 93/1569 by a woman in Ush on Seggri.

You asked me, dear friend, to tell you anything I might like people on other worlds to know about my life and my world. That's not easy! Do I want anybody anywhere else to know anything about my life? I know how strange we seem to all the others, the half-and-half races; I know they think us backward, provincial, even perverse. Maybe in a few more decades we'll decide that we should remake ourselves. I won't be alive then; I don't think

I'd want to be. I like my people. I like our fierce, proud, beautiful men, I don't want them to become like women. I like our trustful, powerful, generous women, I don't want them to become like men. And yet I see that among you each man has his own being and nature, each woman has hers, and I can hardly say what it is I think we would lose.

When I was a child I had a brother a year and a half younger than me. His name was Ittu. My mother had gone to the city and paid five years' savings for my sire, a Master Champion in the Dancing. Ittu's sire was an old fellow at our village fuckery; they called him "Master Fallback." He'd never been a champion at anything, hadn't sired a child for years, and was only too glad to fuck for free. My mother always laughed about it – she was still suckling me, she didn't even use a preventive, and she tipped him two coppers! When she found herself pregnant she was furious. When they tested and found it was a male fetus she was even more disgusted at having, as they say, to wait for the miscarriage. But when Ittu was born sound and healthy, she gave the old sire two hundred coppers, all the cash she had.

He wasn't delicate like so many boy babies, but how can you keep from protecting and cherishing a boy? I don't remember when I wasn't looking after Ittu, with it all very clear in my head what Little Brother should do and shouldn't do and all the perils I must keep him from. I was proud of my responsibility, and vain, too, because I had a brother to look after. Not one other motherhouse in my village had a son still living at home.

Ittu was a lovely child, a star. He had the fleecy soft hair that's common in my part of Ush, and big eyes; his nature was sweet and cheerful, and he was very bright. The other children loved him and always wanted to play with him, but he and I were happiest playing by ourselves, long elaborate games of make-believe. We had a herd of twelve cattle an old woman of the village had carved from gourdshell for Ittu – people always gave him presents – and they were the actors in our dearest game. Our cattle lived in a country called Shush, where they had great adventures, climbing mountains, discovering new lands, sailing on rivers, and so on. Like any herd, like our village herd, the old cows were the leaders; the bull lived apart; the other males were gelded; and the heifers were the adventurers. Our bull would make ceremonial visits to service the cows, and then he might have to go fight with men at Shush Castle. We made the castle of clay and the men of sticks, and the bull always won, knocking the stick-men to pieces. Then sometimes he knocked the castle to pieces too. But the best of our stories were told with two of the heifers. Mine was named Op and my brother's was Utti. Once our hero heifers were having a great adventure on

the stream that runs past our village, and their boat got away from us. We found it caught against a log far downstream where the stream was deep and quick. My heifer was still in it. We both dived and dived, but we never found Utti. She had drowned. The Cattle of Shush had a great funeral for her, and Ittu cried very bitterly.

He mourned his brave little toy cow so long that I asked Djerdji the cattleherd if we could work for her, because I thought being with the real cattle might cheer Ittu up. She was glad to get two cowhands for free (when Mother found out we were really working, she made Djerdji pay us a quarter-copper a day.) We rode two big, goodnatured old cows, on saddles so big Ittu could lie down on his. We took a herd of two-year-old calves out onto the desert every day to forage for the edta that grows best when it's grazed. We were supposed to keep them from wandering off and from trampling streambanks, and when they wanted to settle down and chew the cud we were supposed to gather them in a place where their droppings would nourish useful plants. Our old mounts did most of the work. Mother came out and checked on what we were doing and decided it was all right, and being out in the desert all day was certainly keeping us fit and healthy.

We loved our riding cows, but they were serious-minded and responsible, rather like the grown-ups in our motherhouse. The calves were something else; they were all riding breed, not fine animals of course, just villagebred; but living on edta they were fat and had plenty of spirit. Ittu and I rode them bareback with a rope rein. At first we always ended up on our own backs watching a calf's heels and tail flying off. By the end of a year we were good riders, and took to training our mounts to tricks, trading mounts at a full run, and hornvaulting. Ittu was a marvelous hornvaulter. He trained a big three-year-old roan ox with lyre horns, and the two of them danced like the finest vaulters of the great Castles that we saw on the holos. We couldn't keep our excellence to ourselves out in the desert; we started showing off to the other children, inviting them to come out to Salt Springs to see our Great Trick Riding Show. And so of course the adults got to hear of it.

My mother was a brave woman, but that was too much for even her, and she said to me in cold fury, "I trusted you to look after Ittu. You let me down."

All the others had been going on and on about endangering the precious life of a boy, the Vial of Hope, the Treasurehouse of Life and so on, but it was what my mother said that hurt.

"I do look after Ittu, and he looks after me," I said to her, in that passion

of justice that children know, the birthright we seldom honor. "We both know what's dangerous and we don't do stupid things and we know our cattle and we do everything together. When he has to go to the Castle he'll have to do lots more dangerous things, but at least he'll already know how to do one of them. And there he has to do them alone, but we did everything together. And I didn't let you down."

My mother looked at us. I was nearly twelve, Ittu was ten. She burst into tears, she sat down on the dirt and wept aloud. Ittu and I both went to her and hugged her and cried. Ittu said, "I won't go. I won't go to the damned Castle. They can't make me!"

And I believed him. He believed himself. My mother knew better.

Maybe some day it will be possible for a boy to choose his life. Among your peoples a man's body does not shape his fate, does it? Maybe some day that will be so here.

Our Castle, Hidjegga, had of course been keeping their eye on Ittu ever since he was born; once a year Mother would send them the doctor's report on him, and when he was five Mother and her wives took him out there for the ceremony of Confirmation. Ittu had been embarrassed, disgusted, and flattered. He told me in secret, "There were all these old men that smelled funny and they made me take off my clothes and they had these measuring things and they measured my peepee! And they said it was very good. They said it was a good one. What happens when you descend?" It wasn't the first question he had ever asked me that I couldn't answer, and as usual I made up the answer. "Descend means you can have babies," I said, which, in a way, wasn't so far off the mark.

Some Castles, I am told, prepare boys of nine and ten for the Severance, woo them with visits from older boys, tickets to games, tours of the park and the buildings, so that they may be quite eager to go to the Castle when they turn eleven. But we "outyonders," villagers of the edge of the desert, kept to the harsh old-fashioned ways. Aside from Confirmation, a boy had no contact at all with men until his eleventh birthday. On that day everybody he had ever known brought him to the Gate and gave him to the strangers with whom he would live the rest of his life. Men and women alike believed and still believe that this absolute severance makes the man.

Vev Ushiggi, who had borne a son and had a grandson, and had been mayor five or six times, and was held in great esteem even though she'd never had much money, heard Ittu say that he wouldn't go to the damned Castle. She came next day to our motherhouse and asked to talk to him. He told me what she said. She didn't do any wooing or sweetening. She told him that he was born to the service of his people and had one respon-

sibility, to sire children when he got old enough; and one duty, to be a strong, brave man, stronger and braver than other men, so that women would choose him to sire their children. She said he had to live in the Castle because men could not live among women. At this, Ittu asked her, "Why can't they?"

"You did?" I said, awed by his courage, for Vev Ushiggi was a formidable old woman.

"Yes. And she didn't really answer. She took a long time. She looked at me and then she looked off somewhere and then she stared at me for a long time and then finally she said, 'Because we would destroy them.'"

"But that's crazy," I said. "Men are our treasures. What did she say that for?"

Ittu, of course, didn't know. But he thought hard about what she had said, and I think nothing she could have said would have so impressed him.

After discussion, the village elders and my mother and her wives decided that Ittu could go on practicing hornvaulting, because it really would be a useful skill for him in the Castle; but he could not herd cattle any longer, nor go with me when I did, nor join in any of the work children of the village did, nor their games. "You've done everything together with Po," they told him, "but she should be doing things together with the other girls, and you should be doing things by yourself, the way men do."

They were always very kind to Ittu, but they were stern with us girls; if they saw us even talking with Ittu they'd tell us to go on about our work, leave the boy alone. When we disobeyed – when Ittu and I sneaked off and met at Salt Springs to ride together, or just hid out in our old playplace down in the draw by the stream to talk – he got treated with cold silence to shame him, but I got punished. A day locked in the cellar of the old fiber-processing mill, which was what my village used for a jail; next time it was two days; and the third time they caught us alone together, they locked me in that cellar for ten days. A young woman called Fersk brought me food once a day and made sure I had enough water and wasn't sick, but she didn't speak; that's how they always used to punish people in the villages. I could hear the other children going by up on the street in the evening. It would get dark at last and I could sleep. All day I had nothing to do, no work, nothing to think about except the scorn and contempt they held me in for betraying their trust, and the injustice of my getting punished when Ittu didn't.

When I came out, I felt different. I felt like something had closed up inside me while I was closed up in that cellar.

When we ate at the motherhouse they made sure Ittu and I didn't sit

near each other. For a while we didn't even talk to each other. I went back to school and work. I didn't know what Ittu was doing all day. I didn't think about it. It was only fifty days to his birthday.

One night I got into bed and found a note under my clay pillow: in the draw to-nt. Ittu never could spell; what writing he knew I had taught him in secret. I was frightened and angry, but I waited an hour till everybody was asleep, and got up and crept outside into the windy, starry night, and ran to the draw. It was late in the dry season and the stream was barely running. Ittu was there, hunched up with his arms round his knees, a little lump of shadow on the pale, cracked clay at the waterside.

The first thing I said was, "You want to get me locked up again? They said next time it would be thirty days!"

"They're going to lock me up for fifty years," Ittu said, not looking at me.

"What am I supposed to do about it? It's the way it has to be! You're a man. You have to do what men do. They won't lock you up, anyway, you get to play games and come to town to do service and all that. You don't even know what being locked up is!"

"I want to go to Seradda," Ittu said, talking very fast, his eyes shining as he looked up at me. "We could take the riding cows to the bus station in Redang, I saved my money, I have 23 coppers, we could take the bus to Seradda. The cows would come back home if we turned them loose."

"What do you think you'd do in Seradda?" I asked, disdainful but curious. Nobody from our village had ever been to the capital.

"The Ekkamen people are there," he said.

"The Ekumen," I corrected him. "So what?"

"They could take me away," Ittu said.

I felt very strange when he said that. I was still angry and still disdainful but a sorrow was rising in me like dark water. "Why would they do that? What would they talk to some little boy for? How would you find them? 23 coppers isn't enough anyway. Seradda's way far off. That's a really stupid idea. You can't do that."

"I thought you'd come with me," Ittu said. His voice was softer, but didn't shake.

"I wouldn't do a stupid thing like that," I said furiously.

"All right," he said. "But you won't tell. Will you?"

"No, I won't tell!" I said. "But you can't run away, Ittu. You can't. It would be – it would be dishonorable."

This time when he answered his voice shook. "I don't care," he said. "I don't care about honor. I want to be free!"

We were both in tears. I sat down by him and we leaned together the way we used to, and cried a while; not long; we weren't used to crying.

"You can't do it," I whispered to him. "It won't work, Ittu."

He nodded, accepting my wisdom.

"It won't be so bad at the Castle," I said.

After a minute he drew away from me very slightly.

"We'll see each other," I said.

He said only, "When?"

"At games. I can watch you. I bet you'll be the best rider and hornvaulter there. I bet you win all the prizes and get to be a Champion."

He nodded, dutiful. He knew and I knew that I had betrayed our love and our birthright of justice. He knew he had no hope.

That was the last time we talked together alone, and almost the last time we talked together.

Ittu ran away about ten days after that, taking the riding cow and heading for Redang; they tracked him easily and had him back in the village before nightfall. I don't know if he thought I had told them where he would be going. I was so ashamed of not having gone with him that I could not look at him. I kept away from him; they didn't have to keep me away any more. He made no effort to speak to me.

I was beginning my puberty, and my first blood was the night before Ittu's birthday. Menstruating women are not allowed to come near the Gates at conservative Castles like ours, so when Ittu was made a man I stood far back among a few other girls and women, and could not see much of the ceremony. I stood silent while they sang, and looked down at the dirt and my new sandals and my feet in the sandals, and felt the ache and tug of my womb and the secret movement of the blood, and grieved. I knew even then that this grief would be with me all my life.

Ittu went in and the Gates closed.

He became a Young Champion Hornvaulter, and for two years, when he was eighteen and nineteen, came a few times to service in our village, but I never saw him. One of my friends fucked with him and started to tell me about it, how nice he was, thinking I'd like to hear, but I shut her up and walked away in a blind rage which neither of us understood.

He was traded away to a castle on the east coast when he was twenty. When my daughter was born I wrote him, and several times after that, but he never answered my letters.

I don't know what I've told you about my life and my world. I don't know if it's what I want you to know. It is what I had to tell.

The following is a short story written in 93/1586 by a popular writer of the city of Adr, Sem Gridji. The classic literature of Seggri was the narrative poem and the drama. Classical poems and plays were written collaboratively, in the original version and also by re-writers of subsequent generations, usually anonymous. Small value was placed on preserving a 'true' text, since the work was seen as an ongoing process. Probably under Ekumenical influence, individual writers in the late sixteenth century began writing short prose narratives, historical and fictional. The genre became popular, particularly in the cities, though it never obtained the immense audience of the great classical epics and plays. Literally everyone knew the plots and many quotations from the epics and plays, from books and holo, and almost every adult woman had seen or participated in a staged performance of several of them. They were one of the principal unifying influences of the Seggrian monoculture. The prose narrative, read in silence, served rather as a device by which the culture might question itself, and a tool for individual moral self-examination. Conservative Seggrian women disapproved of the genre as antagonistic to the intensely cooperative, collaborative structure of their society. Fiction was not included in the curriculum of the literature departments of the colleges. and was often dismissed contemptuously – "fiction is for men."

Sem Gridji published three books of stories. Her bare, blunt style is characteristic of the Seggrian short story.

Love Out of Place

by Sem Gridji

Azak grew up in a motherhouse in the Downriver Quarter, near the textile mills. She was a bright girl, and her family and neighborhood were proud to gather the money to send her to college. She came back to the city as a starting manager at one of the mills. Azak worked well with other people; she prospered. She had a clear idea of what she wanted to do in the next few years: to find two or three partners with whom to found a daughter-house and a business.

A beautiful woman in the prime of youth, Azak took great pleasure in sex, especially liking intercourse with men. Though she saved money for her plan of founding a business, she also spent a good deal at the fuckery, going there often, sometimes hiring two men at once. She liked to see how they incited each other to prowess beyond what they would have achieved alone, and shamed each other when they failed. She found a flaccid penis very disgusting, and did not hesitate to send away a man who could not penetrate her three or four times an evening.

The Castle of her district bought a Young Champion at the Southeast Castles Dance Tournament, and soon sent him to the fuckery. Having seen

him dance in the finals on the holovision and been captivated by his flowing, graceful style and his beauty, Azak was eager to have him service her. His price was twice that of any other man there, but she did not hesitate to pay it. She found him handsome and amiable, eager and gentle, skilful and compliant. In their first evening they came to orgasm together five times. When she left she gave him a large tip. Within the week she was back, asking for Toddra. The pleasure he gave her was exquisite, and soon she was quite obsessed with him.

"I wish I had you all to myself," she said to him one night as they lay still conjoined, languorous and fulfilled.

"That is my heart's desire," he said. "I wish I were your servant. None of the other women that come here arouse me. I don't want them. I want only you."

She wondered if he was telling the truth. The next time she came, she inquired casually of the manager if Toddra were as popular as they had hoped. "No," the manager said. "Everybody else reports that he takes a lot of arousing, and is sullen and careless towards them."

"How strange," Azak said.

"Not at all," said the manager. "He's in love with you."

"A man in love with a woman?" Azak said, and laughed.

"It happens all too often," the manager said.

"I thought only women fell in love," said Azak.

"Women fall in love with a man, sometimes, and that's bad too," said the manager. "May I warn you, Azak? Love should be between women. It's out of place here. It can never come to any good end. I hate to lose the money, but I wish you'd fuck with some of the other men and not always ask for Toddra. You're encouraging him, you see, in something that does harm to him."

"But he and you are making lots of money from me!" said Azak, still taking it as a joke.

"He'd make more from other women if he wasn't in love with you," said the manager. To Azak that seemed a weak argument against the pleasure she had in Toddra, and she said, "Well, he can fuck them all when I've done with him, but for now, I want him."

After their intercourse that evening, she said to Toddra, "The manager here says you're in love with me."

"I told you I was," Toddra said. "I told you I wanted to belong to you, to serve you, you alone. I would die for you, Azak."

"That's foolish," she said.

"Don't you like me? Don't I please you?"

"More than any man I ever knew," she said, kissing him. "You are beautiful and utterly satisfying, my sweet Toddra."

"You don't want any of the other men here, do you?" he asked.

"No. They're all ugly fumlbers, compared to my beautiful dancer."

"Listen, then," he said, sitting up and speaking very seriously. He was a slender man of twenty-two, with long, smooth-muscled limbs, wide-set eyes, and a thin-lipped, sensitive mouth. Azak lay stroking his thigh, thinking how lovely and lovable he was. "I have a plan," he said. "When I dance, you know, in the story-dances, I play a woman, of course; I've done it since I was twelve. People always say they can't believe I really am a man, I play a woman so well. If I escaped – from here, from the Castle – as a woman – I could come to your house as a servant –"

"What?" cried Azak, astounded.

"I could live there," he said urgently, bending over her. "With you. I would always be there. You could have me every night. It would cost you nothing, except my food. I would serve you, service you, sweep your house, do anything, anything, Azak, please, my beloved, my mistress, let me be yours!" He saw that she was still incredulous, and hurried on, "You could send me away when you got tired of me –"

"If you tried to go back to the Castle after an escapade like that they'd whip you to death, you idiot!"

"I'm valuable," he said. "They'd punish me, but they wouldn't damage me."

"You're wrong. You haven't been dancing, and your value here has slipped because you don't perform well with anybody but me. The manager told me so."

Tears stood in Toddra's eyes. Azak disliked giving him pain, but she was genuinely shocked at his wild plan. "And if you were discovered, my dear," she said more gently, "I would be utterly disgraced. It is a very childish plan, Toddra: please never dream of such a thing again. But I am truly, truly fond of you, I adore you and want no other man but you. Do you believe that, Toddra?"

He nodded. Restraining his tears, he said, "For now."

"For now and for a long, long, long time! My dear, sweet, beautiful dancer, we have each other as long as we want, years and years! Only do your duty by the other women that come, so that you don't get sold away by your Castle, please! I couldn't bear to lose you, Toddra." And she clasped him passionately in her arms, and arousing him at once, opened to him, and soon both were crying out in the throes of delight.

Though she could not take his love entirely seriously, since what could

come of such a misplaced emotion, except such foolish schemes as he had proposed? – still he touched her heart, and she felt a tenderness towards him that greatly enhanced the pleasure of their intercourse. So for more than a year she spent two or three nights a week with him at the fuckery, which was as much as she could afford. The manager, trying still to discourage his love, would not lower Toddra's fee, even though he was unpopular among the other clients of the fuckery; so Azak spent a great deal of money on him, although he would never, after the first night, accept a tip from her.

Then a woman who had not been able to conceive with any of the sires at the fuckery tried Toddra, and at once conceived, and being tested found the fetus to be male. Another woman conceived by him, again a male fetus. At once Toddra was in demand as a sire. Women began coming from all over the city to be serviced by him. This meant, of course, that he must be free during their period of ovulation. There were now many evenings that he could not meet Azak, for the manager was not to be bribed. Toddra disliked his popularity, but Azak soothed and reassured him, telling him how proud she was of him, and how his work would never interfere with their love. In fact, she was not altogether sorry that he was so much in demand, for she had found another person with whom she wanted to spend her evenings.

This was a young woman named Zedr, who worked in the mill as a machine repair specialist. She was tall and handsome; Azak noticed first how freely and strongly she walked and how proudly she stood. She found a pretext to make her acquaintance. It seemed to Azak that Zedr admired her; but for a long time each behaved to the other as a friend only, making no sexual advances. They were much in each other's company, going to games and dances together, and Azak found that she enjoyed this open and sociable life better than always being in the fuckery alone with Toddra. They talked about how they might set up a machine-repair service in partnership. As time went on, Azak found that Zedr's beautiful body was always in her thoughts. At last, one evening in her singlewoman's flat, she told her friend that she loved her, but did not wish to burden their friendship with an unwelcome desire.

Zedr replied, "I have wanted you ever since I first saw you, but I didn't want to embarrass you with my desire. I thought you preferred men."

"Until now I did, but I want to make love with you," Azak said.

She found herself quite timid at first, but Zedr was expert and subtle, and could prolong Azak's orgasms till she found such consummation as she had not dreamed of. She said to Zedr, "You have made me a woman."

"Then let's make each other wives," said Zedr joyfully.

They married, moved to a house in the west of the city, and left the mill, setting up in business together.

All this time, Azak had said nothing of her new love to Toddra, whom she had seen less and less often. A little ashamed of her cowardice, she reassured herself that he was so busy performing as a sire that he would not really miss her. After all, despite his romantic talk of love, he was a man, and to a man fucking is the most important thing, instead of being merely one element of love and life as it is to a woman.

When she married Zedr, she sent Toddra a letter, saying that their lives had drifted apart, and she was now moving away and would not see him again, but would always remember him fondly.

She received an immediate answer from Toddra, a letter begging her to come and talk with him, full of avowals of unchanging love, badly spelled and almost illegible. The letter touched, embarrassed, and shamed her, and she did not answer it.

He wrote again and again, and tried to reach her on the holonet at her new business. Zedr encouraged her not to make any response, saying, "It would be cruel to encourage him."

Their new business went well from the start. They were home one evening busy chopping vegetables for dinner when there was a knock at the door. "Come in," Zedr called, thinking it was Chochi, a friend they were considering as a third partner. A stranger entered, a tall, beautiful woman with a scarf over her hair. The stranger went straight to Azak, saying in a strangled voice, "Azak, Azak, please, please let me stay with you." The scarf fell back from his long hair. Azak recognised Toddra.

She was astonished and a little frightened, but she had known Toddra a long time and been very fond of him, and this habit of affection made her put out her hands to him in greeting. She saw fear and despair in his face, and was sorry for him.

But Zedr, guessing who he was, was both alarmed and angry. She kept the chopping-knife in her hand. She slipped from the room and called the city police.

When she returned she saw the man pleading with Azak to let him stay hidden in their household as a servant. "I will do anything," he said. "Please, Azak, my only love, please! I can't live without you. I can't service those women, those strangers who only want to be impregnated. I can't dance any more. I think only of you, you are my only hope. I will be a woman, no one will know. I'll cut my hair, no one will know!" So he went on, almost threatening in his passion, but pitiful also. Zedr listened coldly,

thinking he was mad. Azak listened with pain and shame. "No, no, it is not possible," she said over and over, but he would not hear.

When the police came to the door and he realised who they were, he bolted to the back of the house seeking escape. The policewomen caught him in the bedroom; he fought them desperately, and they subdued him brutally. Azak shouted at them not to hurt him, but they paid no heed, twisting his arms and hitting him about the head till he stopped resisting. They dragged him out. The head of the troop stayed to take evidence. Azak tried to plead for Toddra, but Zedr stated the facts and added that she thought he was insane and dangerous.

After some days, Azak inquired at the police office and was told that Toddra had been returned to his Castle with a warning not to send him to the fuckery again for a year or until the Lords of the Castle found him capable of responsible behavior. She was uneasy thinking of how he might be punished. Zedr said, "They won't hurt him, he's too valuable," just as he himself had said. Azak was glad to believe this. She was, in fact, much relieved to know that he was out of the way.

She and Zedr took Chochi first into their business and then into their household. Chochi was a woman from the dockside quarter, tough and humorous, a hard worker and an undemanding, comfortable lovemaker. They were happy with one another, and prospered.

A year went by, and another year. Azak went to her old quarter to arrange a contract for repair work with two women from the mill where she had first worked. She asked them about Toddra. He was back at the fuckery from time to time, they told her. He had been named the year's Champion Sire of his Castle, and was much in demand, bringing an even higher price, because he impregnated so many women and so many of the conceptions were male. He was not in demand for pleasure, they said, as he had a reputation for roughness and even cruelty. Women asked for him only if they wanted to conceive. Thinking of his gentleness with her, Azak found it hard to imagine him behaving brutally. Harsh punishment at the Castle, she thought, must have altered him. But she could not believe that he had truly changed.

Another year passed. The business was doing very well, and Azak and Chochi both began talking seriously about having children. Zedr was not interested in bearing, though happy to be a mother. Chochi had a favorite man at their local fuckery to whom she went now and then for pleasure; she began going to him at ovulation, for he had a good reputation as a sire.

Azak had never been to a fuckery since she and Zedr married. She honored fidelity highly, and made love with no one but Zedr and Chochi.

When she thought of being impregnated, she found that her old interest in fucking with men had quite died out or even turned to distaste. She did not like the idea of self-impregnation from the sperm bank, but the idea of letting a strange man penetrate her was even more repulsive. Thinking what to do, she thought of Toddra, whom she had truly loved and had pleasure with. He was again a Champion Sire, known throughout the city as a reliable impregnator. There was certainly no other man with whom she could take any pleasure. And he had loved her so much he had put his career and even his life in danger, trying to be with her. That irresponsibility was over and done with. He had never written to her again, and the Castle and the managers of the fuckery would never have let him service women if they thought him mad or untrustworthy. After all this time, she thought, she could go back to him and give him the pleasure he had so desired.

She notified the fuckery of the expected period of her next ovulation, requesting Toddra. He was already engaged for that period, and they offered her another sire; but she preferred to wait till the next month.

Chochi had conceived, and was elated. "Hurry up, hurry up!" she said to Azak. "We want twins!"

Azak found herself looking forward to being with Toddra. Regretting the violence of their last encounter and the pain it must have given him, she wrote the following letter to him:

"My dear, I hope our long separation and the distress of our last meeting will be forgotten in the joy of being together again, and that you still love me as I still love you. I shall be very proud to bear your child, and let us hope it may be a son! I am impatient to see you again, my beautiful dancer. Your Azak."

There had not been time for him to answer this letter when her ovulation period began. She dressed in her best clothes. Zedr still distrusted Toddra and had tried to dissuade her from going to him; she bade her "Good luck!" rather sulkily. Chochi hung a mothercharm round her neck, and she went off.

There was a new manager on duty at the fuckery, a coarse-faced young woman who told her, "Call out if he gives you any trouble. He may be a Champion but he's rough, and we don't let him get away with hurting anybody."

"He won't hurt me," Azak said smiling, and went eagerly into the familiar room where she and Toddra had enjoyed each other so often. He was standing waiting at the window just as he had used to stand. When he turned he looked just as she remembered, long-limbed, his silky hair flow-

ing like water down his back, his wide-set eyes gazing at her.

"Toddra!" she said, coming to him with outstretched hands.

He took her hands and said her name.

"Did you get my letter? Are you happy?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"And all that unhappiness, all that foolishness about love, is it over? I am so sorry you were hurt, Toddra, I don't want any more of that. Can we just be ourselves and be happy together as we used to be?"

"Yes, all that is over," he said. "And I am happy to see you." He drew her gently to him. Gently he began to undress her and caress her body, just as he had used to, knowing what gave her pleasure, and she remembering what gave him pleasure. They lay down naked together. She was fondling his erect penis, aroused and yet a little reluctant to be penetrated after so long, when he moved his arm as if uncomfortable. Drawing away from him a little, she saw that he had a knife in his hand, which he must have hidden in the bed. He was holding it concealed behind his back.

Her womb went cold, but she continued to fondle his penis and testicles, not daring to say anything and not able to pull away, for he was holding her close with the other hand.

Suddenly he moved onto her and forced his penis into her vagina with a thrust so painful that for an instant she thought it was the knife. He ejaculated instantly. As his body arched she writhed out from under him, scrambled to the door, and ran from the room crying for help.

He pursued her, striking with the knife, stabbing her in the shoulder-blade before the manager and other women and men seized him. The men were very angry and treated him with a violence which the manager's protests did not lessen. Naked, bloody, and half-conscious, he was bound and taken away immediately to the Castle.

Everyone now gathered around Azak, and her wound, which was slight, was cleaned and covered. Shaken and confused, she could ask only, "What will they do to him?"

"What do you think they do to a murdering rapist? Give him a prize?" the manager said. "They'll geld him."

"But it was my fault," Azak said.

The manager stared at her and said, "Are you mad? Go home."

She went back into the room and mechanically put on her clothes. She looked at the bed where they had lain. She stood at the window where Toddra had stood. She remembered how she had seen him dance long ago in the contest where he had first been made champion. She thought, "My life is wrong." But she did not know how to make it right.

Alteration in Seggrian social and cultural institutions did not take the disastrous course Merriment feared. It has been slow and its direction is not clear. In 93/1602 Terhada College invited men from two neighboring Castles to apply as students, and three men did so. In the next decades, most colleges opened their doors to men. Once they were graduated, male students had to return to their Castle, unless they left the planet, since native men were not allowed to live anywhere but as students in a college or in a Castle, until the Open Gate Law was passed in 93/1662.

Even after passage of that law, the Castles remained closed to women; and the exodus of men from the Castles was much slower than opponents of the measure feared. Social adjustment to the Open Gate Law has been slow. In several regions programs to train men in basic skills such as farming and construction have met with moderate success; the men work in competitive teams, separate from and managed by the women's companies. A good many Seggri have come to Hain to study in recent years – more men than women, despite the great numerical imbalance that still exists.

The following autobiographical sketch by one of these men is of particular interest, since he was involved in the event which directly precipitated the Open Gate Law.

Autobiographical Sketch by Mobile Ardar Dez.

I was born in Ekumenical Cycle 93, Year 1641, in Rakedr on Seggri. Rakedr was a placid, prosperous, conservative town, and I was brought up in the old way, the petted boychild of a big motherhouse. Altogether there were seventeen of us, not counting the kitchen staff – a great-grandmother, two grandmothers, four mothers, nine daughters, and me. We were well off; all the women were or had been managers or skilled workers in the Rakedr Pottery, the principal industry of the town. We kept all the holidays with pomp and energy, decorating the house from roof to foundation with banners for Hillalli, making fantastic costumes for the Harvest Festival, and celebrating somebody's birthday every few weeks with gifts all round. I was petted, as I said, but not, I think, spoiled. My birthday was no grander than my sisters', and I was allowed to run and play with them just as if I were a girl. Yet I was always aware, as were they, that our mothers' eyes rested on me with a different look, brooding, reserved, and sometimes, as I grew older, desolate.

After my Confirmation, my birthmother or her mother took me to Rakedr Castle every spring on Visiting Day. The gates of the Park, which had opened to admit me alone (and terrified) for my Confirmation, remained shut, but rolling stairs were placed against the Park walls. Up these I and a few other little boys from the town climbed, to sit on top of

the Park wall in great state, on cushions, under awnings, and watch demonstration dancing, bull-dancing, wrestling, and other sports on the great Gamefield inside the wall. Our mothers waited below, outside, in the bleachers of the public field. Men and youths from the Castle sat with us, explaining the rules of the games and pointing out the fine points of a dancer or wrestler, treating us seriously, making us feel important. I enjoyed that very much, but as soon as I came down off the wall and started home it all fell away like a costume shrugged off, a part played in a play; and I went on with my work and play in the motherhouse with my family, my real life.

When I was ten I went to Boys' Class downtown. The class had been set up forty or fifty years before as a bridge between the motherhouse and the Castle, but the Castle, under increasingly reactionary governance, had recently withdrawn from the project. Lord Fassaw forbade his men to go anywhere outside the walls but directly to the fuckery, in a closed car, returning at first light; and so no men were able to teach the class. The townswomen who tried to tell me what to expect when I went to the Castle did not really know much more than I did. However wellmeaning they were, they mostly frightened and confused me. But fear and confusion were an appropriate preparation.

I cannot describe the ceremony of Severance. I really cannot describe it. Men on Seggri, in those days, had this advantage: they knew what death is. They had all died once before their body's death. They had turned and looked back at their whole life, every place and face they had loved, and turned away from it as the gate closed.

At the time of my Severance, our small Castle was internally divided into "collegials" and "traditionals," a liberal faction left from the regime of Lord Ishog and a younger, highly conservative faction. The split was already disastrously wide when I came to the Castle. Lord Fassaw's rule had grown increasingly harsh and irrational. He governed by corruption, brutality, and cruelty. All of us who lived there were of course infected, and would have been destroyed if there had not been a strong, constant, moral resistance, centered around Ragaz and Kohadrat, who had been proteges of Lord Ishog. The two men were open partners; their followers were all the homosexuals in the Castle, and a good number of other men and older boys.

My first days and months in the Scrubs' dormitory were a bewildering alternation: terror, hatred, shame, as the boys who had been there a few months or years longer than I were incited to humiliate and abuse the newcomer, in order to make a man of him – and comfort, gratitude, love,

as boys who had come under the influence of the collegials offered me secret friendship and protection. They helped me in the games and competitions and took me into their beds at night, not for sex but to keep me from the sexual bullies. Lord Fassaw detested adult homosexuality and would have reinstituted the death penalty if the Town Council had allowed it. Though he did not dare punish Ragaz and Kohadtrat, he punished consenting love between older boys with bizarre and appalling physical mutilations – ears cut into fringes, fingers branded with redhot iron rings. Yet he encouraged the older boys to rape the eleven- and twelve-year-olds, as a manly practice. None of us escaped. We particularly dreaded four youths, seventeen or eighteen years old when I came there, who called themselves the Lordsmen. Every few nights they raided the Scrubs' dormitory for a victim, whom they raped as a group. The collegials protected us as best they could by ordering us to their beds, where we wept and protested loudly, while they pretended to abuse us, laughing and jeering. Later, in the dark and silence, they comforted us with candy, and sometimes, as we grew older, with a desired love, gentle and exquisite in its secrecy.

There was no privacy at all in the Castle. I have said that to women who asked me to describe life there, and they thought they understood me. "Well, everybody shares everything in a motherhouse," they would say, "everybody's in and out of the rooms all the time. You're never really alone unless you have a singlewoman's flat." I could not tell them how different the loose, warm commonalty of the motherhouse was from the rigid, deliberate publicity of the forty-bed, brightly-lighted Castle dormitories. Nothing in Rakedr was private: only secret, only silent. We ate our tears.

I grew up; I take some pride in that, along with my profound gratitude to the boys and men who made it possible. I did not kill myself, as several boys did during those years, nor did I kill my mind and soul, as some did so their body could survive. Thanks to the maternal care of the collegials – the resistance, as we came to call ourselves – I grew up.

Why do I say maternal, not paternal? Because there were no fathers in my world. There were only sires. I knew no such word as father or paternal. I thought of Ragaz and Kohadtrat as my mothers. I still do.

Fassaw grew quite mad as the years went on, and his hold over the Castle tightened to a deathgrip. The Lordsmen now ruled us all. They were lucky in that we still had a strong Maingame team, the pride of Fassaw's heart, which kept us in the First League, as well as two Champion Sires in steady demand at the town fuckeries. Any protest the resistance tried to bring to the Town Council could be dismissed as typical male whining, or laid to the demoralising influence of the Aliens. From the outside Rakedr

Castle seemed all right. Look at our great team! Look at our champion studs! The women looked no further.

How could they abandon us? – the cry every Seggrian boy must make in his heart. How could she leave me here? Doesn't she know what it's like? Why doesn't she know? Doesn't she want to know?

"Of course not," Ragaz said to me when I came to him in a passion of righteous indignation, the Town Council having denied our petition to be heard. "Of course they don't want to know how we live. Why do they never come into the Castles? Oh, we keep them out, yes; but do you think we could keep them out if they wanted to enter? My dear, we collude with them and they with us in maintaining the great foundation of ignorance and lies on which our civilisation rests."

"Our own mothers abandon us," I said.

"Abandon us? Who feeds us, clothes us, houses us, pays us? We're utterly dependent on them. If ever we made ourselves independent, perhaps we could rebuild society on a foundation of truth."

Independence was as far as his vision could reach. Yet I think his mind groped further, towards what he could not see, the body's obscure, inalterable dream of mutuality.

Our effort to make our case heard at the Council had no effect except within the Castle. Lord Fassaw saw his power threatened. Within a few days Ragaz was seized by the Lordsmen and their bully boys, accused of repeated homosexual acts and treasonable plots, arraigned, and sentenced by the Lord of the Castle. Everyone was summoned to the Gamefield to witness the punishment. A man of fifty with a heart ailment – he had been a Maingame racer in his twenties and had overtrained – Ragaz was tied naked across a bench and beaten with 'Lord Long,' a heavy leather tube filled with lead weights. The Lordsmen Berhed, who wielded it, struck repeatedly at the head, the kidneys, and the genitals. Ragaz died an hour or two later in the infirmary.

The Rakedr Mutiny took shape that night. Kohadrat, older than Ragaz and devastated by his loss, could not restrain or guide us. His vision had been of a true resistance, longlasting and nonviolent, through which the Lordsmen would in time destroy themselves. We had been following that vision. Now we let it go. We dropped the truth and grabbed weapons. "How you play is what you win," Kohadrat said, but we had heard all those old saws. We would not play the patience game any more. We would win, now, once for all.

And we did. We won. We had our victory. Lord Fassaw, the Lordsmen and their bullies had been slaughtered by the time the police got to the

Gate.

I remember how those tough women strode in amongst us, staring at the rooms of the Castle which they had never seen, staring at the mutilated bodies, eviscerated, castrated, headless – at Lordsman Berhed, who had been nailed to the floor with ‘Lord Long’ stuffed down his throat – at us, the rebels, the victors, with our bloody hands and defiant faces – at Kohad-rat, whom we thrust forward as our leader, our spokesman.

He stood silent. He ate his tears.

The women drew closer to one another, clutching their guns, staring around. They were appalled, they thought us all insane. Their utter incomprehension drove one of us at last to speak – a young man, Tarsk, who wore the iron ring that had been forced onto his finger when it was redhot. “They killed Ragaz,” he said. “They were all mad. Look.” He held out his crippled hand.

The chief of the troop, after a pause, said, “No one will leave here till this is looked into,” and marched her women out of the Castle, out of the Park, locking the gate behind them, leaving us with our victory.

The hearings and judgments on the Rakedr Mutiny were all broadcast, of course, and the event has been studied and discussed ever since. My own part in it was the murder of the Lordsman Tatiddi. Three of us set on him and beat him to death with exercise-clubs in the gymnasium where we had cornered him.

How we played was what we won.

We were not punished. Men were sent from several Castles to form a government over Rakedr Castle. They learned enough of Fassaw’s behavior to see the cause of our rebellion, but the contempt of even the most liberal of them for us was absolute. They treated us not as men, but as irrational, irresponsible creatures, untamable cattle. If we spoke they did not answer.

I do not know how long we could have endured that cold regime of shame. It was only two months after the Mutiny that the World Council enacted the Open Gate Law. We told one another that that was our victory, we had made that happen. None of us believed it. We told one another we were free. For the first time in history, any man who wanted to leave his Castle could walk out the gate. We were free!

What happened to the free man outside the gate? Nobody had given it much thought.

I was one who walked out the gate, on the morning of the day the Law came into force. Eleven of us walked into town together.

Several of us, men not from Rakedr, went to one or another of the fuck-

eries, hoping to be allowed to stay there; they had nowhere else to go. Hotels and inns of course would not accept men. Those of us who had been children in the town went to our motherhouses.

What is it like to return from the dead? Not easy. Not for the one who returns, nor for his people. The place he occupied in their world has closed up, ceased to be, filled with accumulated change, habit, the doings and needs of others. He has been replaced. To return from the dead is to be a ghost: a person for whom there is no room.

Neither I nor my family understood that, at first. I came back to them at twenty-one as trustingly as if I were the eleven-year-old who had left them, and they opened their arms to their child. But he did not exist. Who was I?

For a long time, months, we refugees from the Castle hid in our motherhouses. The men from other towns all made their way home, usually by begging a ride with teams on tour. There were seven or eight of us in Rakedr, but we scarcely ever saw one another. Men had no place on the street; for hundreds of years a man seen alone on the street had been arrested immediately. If we went out, women ran from us, or reported us, or surrounded and threatened us – “Get back into your Castle where you belong! Get back to the fuckery where you belong! Get out of our city!” They called us drones, and in fact we had no work, no function at all in the community. The fuckeries would not accept us for service, because we had no guarantee of health and good behavior from a Castle.

This was our freedom: we were all ghosts, useless, frightened, frightening intruders, shadows in the corners of life. We watched life going on around us – work, love, childbearing, childrearing, getting and spending, making and shaping, governing and adventuring – the women’s world, the bright, full, real world – and there was no room in it for us. All we had ever learned to do was play games and destroy one another.

My mothers and sisters racked their brains, I know, to find some place and use for me in their lively, industrious household. Two old live-in cooks had run our kitchen since long before I was born, so cooking, the one practical art I had been taught in the Castle, was superfluous. They found household tasks for me, but they were all makework, and they and I knew it. I was perfectly willing to look after the babies, but one of the grandmothers was very jealous of that privilege, and also some of my sisters’ wives were uneasy about a man touching their baby. My sister Pado broached the possibility of an apprenticeship in the clay-works, and I leaped at the chance; but the managers of the Pottery, after long discussion, were unable to agree to accept men as employees. Their hormones would make male workers unreliable, and female workers would be

uncomfortable, and so on.

The holonews was full of such proposals and discussions, of course, and orations about the unforeseen consequences of the Open Gate Law, the proper place of men, male capacities and limitations, gender as destiny. Feeling against the Open Gate policy ran very strong, and it seemed that every time I watched the holo there was a woman talking grimly about the inherent violence and irresponsibility of the male, his biological unfitness to participate in social and political decision-making. Often it was a man saying the same things. Opposition to the new law had the fervent support of all the conservatives in the Castles, who pleaded eloquently for the gates to be closed and men to return to their proper station, pursuing the true, masculine glory of the games and the fuckeries.

Glory did not tempt me, after the years at Rakedr Castle; the word itself had come to mean degradation to me. I ranted against the games and competitions, puzzling most of my family, who loved to watch the Main-games and wrestling, and complained only that the level of excellence of most of the teams had declined since the gates were opened. And I ranted against the fuckeries, where, I said, men were used as cattle, stud bulls, not as human beings. I would never go there again.

"But my dear boy," my mother said at last, alone with me one evening, "will you live the rest of your life celibate?"

"I hope not," I said.

"Then...?"

"I want to get married."

Her eyes widened. She brooded a bit, and finally ventured, "To a man."

"No. To a woman. I want a normal, ordinary marriage. I want to have a wife and be a wife."

Shocking as the idea was, she tried to absorb it. She pondered, frowning.

"All it means," I said, for I had had a long time with nothing to do but ponder, "is that we'd live together just like any married pair. We'd set up our own daughterhouse, and be faithful to each other, and if she had a child I'd be its lovemother along with her. There isn't any reason why it wouldn't work!"

"Well, I don't know – I don't know of any," said my mother, gentle and judicious, and never happy at saying no to me. "But you do have to find the woman, you know."

"I know," I said, glumly.

"It's such a problem for you to meet people," she said. "Perhaps if you went to the fuckery...? I don't see why your own motherhouse couldn't guarantee you just as well as a Castle. We could try –?"

But I passionately refused. Not being one of Fassaw's sycophants, I had seldom been allowed to go to the fuckery; and my few experiences there had been unfortunate. Young, inexperienced, and without recommendation, I had been selected by older women who wanted a plaything. Their practiced skill at arousing me had left me humiliated and enraged. They patted and tipped me as they left. That elaborate, mechanical excitation and their condescending coldness was vile to me, after the tenderness of my lover-protectors in the Castle. Yet women attracted me physically as men never had; the beautiful bodies of my sisters and their wives, all around me constantly now, clothed and naked, innocent and sensual, the wonderful heaviness and strength and softness of women's bodies, kept me continually aroused. Every night I masturbated, fantasizing my sisters in my arms. It was unendurable. Again I was a ghost, a raging, yearning impotence in the midst of untouchable reality.

I began to think I would have to go back to the Castle. I sank into a deep depression, an inertia, a chill darkness of the mind.

My family, anxious, affectionate, busy, had no idea what to do for me or with me. I think most of them thought in their hearts that it would be best if I went back through the gate.

One afternoon my sister Pado, with whom I had been closest as a child, came to my room – they had cleared out a dormer attic for me, so that I had room at least in the literal sense. She found me in my now constant lethargy, lying on the bed doing nothing at all. She breezed in, and with the indifference women often showed to moods and signals, plumped down on the foot of the bed and said, "Hey, what do you know about the man who's here from the Ekumen?"

I shrugged and shut my eyes. I had been having rape fantasies lately. I was afraid of her.

She talked on about the offworlder, who was apparently in Rakedr to study the Mutiny. "He wants to talk to the resistance," she said. "Men like you. The men who opened the gates. He says they won't come forward, as if they were ashamed of being heroes."

"Heroes!" I said. The word in my language is gendered female. It refers to the semi-divine, semi-historic protagonists of the Epics.

"It's what you are," Pado said, intensity breaking through her assumed breeziness. "You took responsibility in a great act. Maybe you did it wrong. Sassume did it wrong in the *Founding of Emmo*, didn't she, she let Faradr get killed. But she was still a hero. She took the responsibility. So did you. You ought to go talk to this Alien. Tell him what happened. Nobody really knows what happened at the Castle. You owe us the story."

That was a powerful phrase, among my people. "The untold story mothers the lie," was the saying. The doer of any notable act was held literally *accountable* for it to the community.

"So why should I tell it to an Alien?" I said, defensive of my inertia.

"Because he'll listen," my sister said drily. "We're all too damned busy."

It was profoundly true. Pado had seen a gate for me and opened it; and I went through it, having just enough strength and sanity left to do so.

Mobile Noem was a man in his forties, born some centuries earlier on Terra, trained on Hain, widely travelled; a small, yellowbrown, quick-eyed person, very easy to talk to. He did not seem at all masculine to me, at first; I kept thinking he was a woman, because he acted like one. He got right to business, with none of the maneuvering to assert his authority or jockeying for position that men of my society felt obligatory in any relationship with another man. I was used to men being wary, indirect, and competitive. Noem, like a woman, was direct and receptive. He was also as subtle and powerful as any man or woman I had known, even Ragaz. His authority was in fact immense; but he never stood on it. He sat down on it, comfortably, and invited you to sit down with him.

I was the first of the Rakedr mutineers to come forward and tell our story to him. He recorded it, with my permission, to use in making his report to the Stables on the condition of our society, "the matter of Seggri," as he called it. My first description of the Mutiny took less than an hour. I thought I was done. I didn't know, then, the inexhaustible desire to learn, to understand, to hear *all* the story, that characterises the Mobiles of the Ekumen. Noem asked questions, I answered; he speculated and extrapolated, I corrected; he wanted details, I furnished them – telling the story of the Mutiny, of the years before it, of the men of the Castle, of the women of the Town, of my people, of my life – little by little, bit by bit, all in fragments, a muddle. I talked to Noem daily for a month. I learned that the story has no beginning, and no story has an end. That the story is all muddle, all middle. That the story is never true, but that the lie is indeed a child of silence.

By the end of the month I had come to love and trust Noem, and of course to depend on him. Talking to him had become my reason for being. I tried to face the fact that he would not stay in Rakedr much longer. I must learn to do without him. Do what? There things for men to do, ways for men to live, he proved it by his mere existence; but could I find them?

He was keenly aware of my situation, and would not let me withdraw, as I began to do, into the lethargy of fear again; he would not let me be silent. He asked me impossible questions. "What would you be if you could be

anything?" he asked me, a question children ask each other.

I answered at once, passionately – "A wife!"

I know now what the flicker that crossed his face was. His quick, kind eyes watched me, looked away, looked back.

"I want my own family," I said. "Not to live in my mothers' house, where I'm always a child. Work. A wife, wives – children – to be a mother. I want life, not games!"

"You can't bear a child," he said gently.

"No, but I can mother one!"

"We gender the word," he said. "I like it better your way... But tell me, Ardar, what are the chances of your marrying – meeting a woman willing to marry a man? It hasn't happened, here, has it?"

I had to say no, not to my knowledge.

"It will happen, certainly, I think," he said (his certainties were always uncertain). "But the personal cost, at first, is likely to be high. Relationships formed against the negative pressure of a society are under terrible strain; they tend to become defensive, over-intense, unpeaceful. They have no room to grow."

"Room!" I said. And I tried to tell him my feeling of having no room in my world, no air to breathe.

He looked at me, scratching his nose; he laughed. "There's plenty of room in the galaxy, you know," he said.

"Do you mean... I could... That the Ekumen..." I didn't even know what the question I wanted to ask was. Noem did. He began to answer it thoughtfully and in detail. My education so far had been so limited, even as regards the culture of my own people, that I would have to attend a college for at least two or three years, in order to be ready to apply to an offworld institution such as the Ekumenical Schools on Hain. Of course, he went on, where I went and what kind of training I chose would depend on my interests, which I would go to a college to discover, since neither my schooling as a child nor my training at the Castle had really given me any idea of what there was to be interested in. The choices offered me had been unbelievably limited, addressing neither the needs of a normally intelligent person nor the needs of my society. And so the Open Gate Law instead of giving me freedom had left me "with no air to breathe but airless Space," said Noem, quoting some poet from some planet somewhere. My head was spinning, full of stars. "Hagka College is quite near Rakedr," Noem said, "did you never think of applying? If only to escape from your terrible Castle?"

I shook my head. "Lord Fassaw always destroyed the application forms when they were sent to his office. If any of us had tried to apply..."

"You would have been punished. Tortured, I suppose. Yes. Well, from the little I know of your colleges, I think your life there would be better than it is here, but not altogether pleasant. You will have work to do, a place to be; but you will be made to feel marginal, inferior. Even highly educated, enlightened women have difficulty accepting men as their intellectual equals. Believe me, I have experienced it myself! And because you were trained at the Castle to compete, to want to excel, you may find it hard to be among people who either believe you incapable of excellence, or to whom the concept of competition, of winning and defeating, is valueless. But just there, there is where you will find air to breathe."

Noem recommended me to women he knew on the faculty of Hagka College, and I was enrolled on probation. My family were delighted to pay my tuition. I was the first of us to go to college, and they were genuinely proud of me.

As Noem had predicted, it was not always easy, but there were enough other men there that I found friends and was not caught in the paralysing isolation of the motherhouse. And as I took courage, I made friends among the women students, finding many of them unprejudiced and companionable. In my third year, one of them and I managed, tentatively and warily, to fall in love. It did not work very well or last very long, yet it was a great liberation for both of us, our liberation from the belief that the only communication or commonality possible between us was sexual, that an adult man and woman had nothing to join them but their genitals. Emadr loathed the professionalism of the fuckery as I did, and our lovemaking was always shy and brief. Its true significance was not as a consummation of desire, but as proof that we could trust each other. Where our real passion broke loose was when we lay together talking, telling each other what our lives had been, how we felt about men and women and each other and ourselves, what our nightmares were, what our dreams were. We talked endlessly, in a communion that I will cherish and honor all my life, two young souls finding their wings, flying together, not for long, but high. The first flight is the highest.

Emadr has been dead two hundred years; she stayed on Seggri, married into a motherhouse, bore two children, taught at Hagka, and died in her seventies. I went to Hain, to the Ekumenical Schools, and later to Werel and Yeowe as part of the Mobile's staff; my record is herewith enclosed. I have written this sketch of my life as part of my application to return to Seggri as a Mobile of the Ekumen. I want very much to live among my people, to learn who they are, now that I know with at least an uncertain certainty who I am.

The Names of Yanils

Chan Davis

YANILS owned the name of Trumpeter. That is not to say that the Fishers *called* him Trumpeter, except twice a year: at and after the Assembly, which he announced with a trumpet blast, and at Convention. With the Chief it was different, he was called no name but Chief of Fishers. Yanils, and others who had been his friends, had forgotten the Chief's birth name from the day he became Chief. Yanils owned the birth name Yanils, and the name of Trumpeter, and the name of Feather.

He kept the trumpet, and it was legitimate for him to look at it in secret even during the winter, though of course he would not want to blow it then even softly. He kept the dangerous headdress of porcupine quills which, when he wore it as Feather, gave him the crest of a giant kingfisher. It was clear to him that the Fishers were the most important and best of the people (though some disagreed), and that he had the most important and fortunate lot of any Fisher (with this he might have had to go to some long-deceased Trumpeter to find agreement).

The Fishers lived along the coast, southward from the mouth of Benwal. All their farms were within trumpet-call. The hunters never stayed overnight any farther than that, either, except in the spring. They did not range northward toward the River at any time: the Badgers had a permanent territory there which other people did not hunt even for game the Badgers could not eat.

Each spring, toward the time of the longest days, a storm came from the western ocean to signal the time of Commencement. Some springs, when none of the storms was very violent, only the Feather could tell which was the signal. Commencement meant primarily conferring manhood on any boys who were ready for it. This lasted several days, which Feather ruled.

All the men, not only the new ones, felt very strange indeed. Then a long sleep, and an extraordinary feast which the women served, made them new men and opened the new year. (For the Beavers' and Badgers' mid-winter New Year's festival, the Fishers had little curiosity or respect.)

If there was a challenge for the name of Chief, it was best held at New Year's. Most years there was not. Every year at New Year's, new Chief or no new Chief, the Feather's second function began. This he enacted alone, and his ceremonial crest of quills was replaced by a more manageable one of duck feathers. The sea was off limits at this season even for Fishers – even for Yanils if bare-headed. But Feather braved the taboo, as often as he was permitted.

The first condition was that the sun had to be visible. When its whole disk was in view, Feather lighted the fire he had ready at the altar. Looking directly past the fire at the sun, he must see the smoke rising to his left. If it did, the third test, which seldom failed, was to offer to the ocean a dugout canoe as long as his hand, containing an effigy kingfisher: this had to float south, away from Benwal. Then Feather took his own canoe out to sea, paddling northward, and keeping watch.

Only in this way would the great schools of fish come. The first Fisher to see one was always the Feather. During the weeks that he was invoking the fish, no nets were sewed – it was obligatory to have them finished before Commencement – and nobody spoke the word "fish". When Feather had seen a school, he flung his crest into the ocean and became Trumpeter. He paddled to the village and ran to blow the trumpet at the altar for Assembly.

The Fisher men dropped whatever they were doing and launched rafts on the ocean, which was full of fish.

The Trumpeter ruled the fishing, and decided when it had gone on for enough days. Then he told the Chief to send messengers to call the other people to Convention.

All the people had a two-day feast of fish – except the Fishers, who could never eat fish, and who feasted on meats brought by the others. The Badgers and Half-moons, the Beavers and Deer, brought many gifts, sometimes including a new wife for the Chief of Fishers; and they went away loaded down with dried salt fish, and with fairly fresh fish wrapped in kelp.

The Trumpeter ruled the Convention. When it was done, he took on his birth name again until the next spring.

It was clear to Yanils that Trumpeter was the mightiest name any of the People had, and that Feather was the most mysterious.

The mysteries were private to him, but not quite secret. All defeated

challengers for the name of Chief – quite young men, usually – became Feather's apprentices for a while and were supposedly made ready to take on the role. (Actually most of them feared nothing worse.) Nobody knew whether a Feather or Trumpeter could die, but everybody knew what happened when the owner of the names died or was incapacitated during the off-season. One of the apprentices took the porcupine headdress, assumed the identity of Feather in an absolutely secret transformation, and called the next Commencement.

Any man could become eligible to learn the role of Feather by losing a challenge for Chief, except the son of a Feather.

Yanils was a calm, dark man with sharp eyebrow ridges and a sharp nose. His eyes were usually lowered – but to study something. The night his predecessor had died, Yanils had had the headdress before the Chief could reflect on how the new Feather was to be selected. At Conventions Yanils bargained well.

His wife died when their son Emelas was nearly grown, and he did not remarry. He began to talk to the boy about the advantages of being Feather. Even when this was as far as he went, it was something he said to nobody else, and Emelas had to be sworn to secrecy. He listened and learned well, sitting at his father's feet. Although he was almost as tall as his father now, he was forever looking up at him. Where Yanils's sharp eyes were always down, leaving his brows to dominate his face, Emelas turned his large dark eyes upward, at his father, at the sky.

This man Yanils, different from all other people and having this single confidant, wanted to give understanding. Emelas would have to become a man in a year or two, but there was no reason why he had to be afraid of it, Yanils told him. To prepare himself, he would watch the next Commencement from hiding.

Any Fisher able to imagine such a sin would recognize without pause for thought that the penalty for discovery would be death. Desperate courage was required to carry it through. All men hunted in the same woods with pumas and bears, and had the proper sort of courage in reserve. Plainly none of them but Yanils could have called on it for this. He did not hesitate. Emelas kept the secret.

The third and crucial night of Commencement, the boy made his own way to an agreed niche between a boulder and a bush. Only the edge of the arena farthest from the altar could be seen from there, but he was not to put his head out to get a more complete view. Each of the men came in sight anyway in the course of their groggy dance, and so did each of the

three boys being initiated. The firelight on their faces seemed violently bright, but Emelas knew he himself was safely dark.

He heard the formulas no boy was supposed to hear until his year had come. What he felt was not the customary terror, or a vicarious form of it, but a special terror all for him. He was not dazed by many hours of dancing; besides, he was not here seeking a spiritual ordeal as the initiates were; for him it was imperative to keep control.

It did not help that the loudest voice, and the highest, and the most uninterrupted, was his father's. It was an unfamiliar, powerful voice, swooping and fluttering like a gale, like a bird. When there were words they were often explanations, repeated over and over, of the interpretation of the next operation to be performed on the initiates. Some were interpreted in terms of kingfishers, some in terms of the other tribes, some in terms of sex. The men of the Fishers, who were well-known to have the most submissive women of any of the people; secretly worshiped, at Commencement, the Mother of Fishers; also, they were the most extreme in arranging that women had nothing essential they lacked. Boys not being equipped with any equivalent of a vagina, they had to be provided with one: a hole was dug in the flesh at the base of the glans by twisting in a sharpened, hot sliver of stone, in such a way that the hole would afterward be covered by the foreskin and could be kept secret from anyone not similarly marked.

"Mother of Fishers, fins of our Mother, gills of our Mother, Mother of the dark wave, Mother of the White wave, brother to our brother in the dark night wave..."

This was the last phase of the initiation, so the men were using up the last of their strength in the dancing which accompanied it. Their thighs were trembling, their balance was about gone. One of them reeled against the other side of Emelas's boulder, then rolled around it and backed away looking the boy full in the face. If the danger could have been fought by throwing a rock or strangling the man, Emelas would have done it silently; since he was helpless, he cried out in surprise. There passed between him and the man the crest of the Feather! The Feather's wail rose – "wind wings, night wings, woman of the day and night, woman of the mountain, woman of the ocean, Mother of the ocean, woman and man of the wind wings" – the other man floated back to the dance, and Emelas knew that although he had been seen and heard, nobody but his father knew he was there.

After the Commencement feast, since there was no challenge, the invocation of fish began at once. It was a warm, drizzly spring, so that it almost

seemed the season had already passed. There were several days in which the sun did not rise clear, then one in which the wind was wrong, then several more cloudy. At last the kingfisher effigy could be given to the ocean. This was done ten different days, separated by days of inauspicious weather, and each time the canoe drifted northward. The Feather never began his vigil on the ocean.

There would be no fishing this year. The occasional bonito and barracuda that foraged off these coasts would run into no nets – and not much prey. It was the *Lame Year*.

Yanils could remember the last one. It had been before he was Feather, but the procedures had been taught him in his apprenticeship, so he played his part smoothly. The day he was sure it was the *Lame Year*, he stood in the water at the beach – not in his canoe – and deliberately took off his crest. He stood motionless, holding it upside down in front of him, for half the morning. By that time the word had got around, and half the Fishers were standing watching him. He began the chant for the *Lame Year*, word for word as he had been taught it. Assembly was a protracted, solemn affair, because it called the Fisher men, not to leap to their boats, but to choose a girl to give away at the Convention. Both Assembly and Convention went off well, although, as usual on *Lame Years*, the Fishers contributed nothing to the feast but corn. Their prestige suffered, they would have to be munificent next year.

The only major consequence was that no initiations were possible at the following Commencement. They required a whole bass skeleton, to become the living presence of the Mother of Fishers, but, as usual following *Lame Years*, there was none. Emelas would have to wait one more year to become a man.

The two of them did not discuss his spying on Commencement, so that there was no one to suggest aloud that the sin had caused the *Lame Year*. This occurred to Yanils, though. He considered it calmly for several days, that fall. It seemed to him that the initiation, even though it occurred at New Year's, didn't have much to do with the ocean, and breaking its rules couldn't change the ocean's willingness to bring them fish. The invocation of the fish had been carried out impeccably, hadn't it?

To consider so was not hard, but to rest easy on such a conclusion, with nobody to support it, was very hard. The Feather's watch for fish the next summer was a lonely and anxious time. He sat day after day in his canoe, very close to the ocean for whose favor he waited, and drew no strength from the mystery of his name. At length the schools came; it was a good year. He was confirmed.

Now Emelas could become a man. Though in all these two years he did not discuss his advance knowledge of the ceremony with his father, and of course never expressed any reluctance, it was plain that the intended prevention of fear had not worked. The boy was afraid, only not mystified. His only comfort was his possibility of looking on the Feather, not as an ominous demi-god, but as his conspirator. Not being able to stand in awe of Yanils, he leaned on him. He became the only Fisher to have sustained that surgical pain with a clear head, without the anesthetic of delirium. He was saddened, but his eyes stayed wide and his back straight.

Yanils, he whose mind was his own, thought how he could make his son Trumpeter. (He inclined to the view that this name would have to be passed on first; breaking tradition with the more occult name of Feather would be harder to put over.) Plans filled his mind during the long days of waiting for sky and wind to allow his canoe to set out.

During the preceding winter, far up the coast to the north, an earthquake had partially blocked a once-deep channel between the mainland and a large island. The great cold current which used to sweep right down the coast was now steered a little more out to sea. This allowed the comparatively desert southern current to run permanently in a course next to the shore, where formerly it had flowed only in widely-scattered exceptional years.

The Feather, confident this year and preoccupied, was a long time accepting the fact of another *Lame Year*. When he had to, he did. It was too late for it to imply guilt to him, he accepted it matter-of-factly and followed the appropriate forms, never observing aloud that this *Lame Year* was uncommonly soon after the last.

However, he and Emelas began surreptitiously seining at night as soon as they could get away with it. It would be convenient to have a sea-bass skeleton hidden away, in case.

They did not catch one, and there were no initiations.

By this time there had been four consecutive *Lame Years*, the need was urgent. Emelas had duly challenged for the name of Chief and been repulsed. One of his friends had challenged the following year and become Chief. Perhaps it helped this Chief's serenity that the next crop of adolescents was not becoming eligible to challenge him, for lack of *Commencements*. Surely it helped Yanils's serenity to have a Chief who had been brought up from childhood to revere him. But Yanils was least able of anyone to look serenely on the plight of the tribe.

The number of girls the Fishers gave away had to be increased to keep

the Conventions equitable. This did not mean a shortage of wives: in fact, girls were staying single longer, for lack of men. The decrease in the size of the tribe would be appreciable in a few years.

Their food supply seemed to be decreasing even faster: able-bodied fellows were kept from hunting because they were formally not yet men, and the women didn't seem able to produce the extra corn the Convention called for. The difficulty of satisfying the Convention feast was eased a little when Trumpeter persuaded the people to accept river fish; but Benwal offered only perch and sunfish in meager supply. Except at Convention these were no help, since Fishers could not eat them.

The main problem was to resume initiations. It was manifestly Feather's problem, and he was struggling with it; he was not yet desperate enough to admit outside the family the need for unblessed ocean fishing, and in any case he doubted that any number of Fishers could find bass in waters where there weren't any.

That summer at Convention the young Chief, wrung with humiliation at the Fishers' fifth failure in six years to serve the customary banquet, and anxious as to how their substitute gifts were being received, without warning saw in front of him the carcass of a large bass. He looked up at the face of the Chief of Half-moons, who was offering him it as a gift. It was incredible, because none of the other tribes fished, and in any case the Half-moons never came near the ocean except for Convention. The Chief of Half-moons waited.

Trumpeter and Emelas, standing by, knew that a crucial moment had arrived. Emelas might have accepted, or cued the Chief to accept, and shown his eagerness – thereby losing more of their scarce credit and also exposing their cult. Not the Trumpeter. He intervened, not as representative of his tribe but as ruler of the Convention. "Chief of Half-moons, when have any people given fish to Fishers?"

The Chief of Half-moons smiled very slightly; the Chief of Fishers, seeing in the offer for the first time a jibe at the poor job *he* had done in offering fish, glowered and made the conventional aggressive sign between Chiefs, hopping twice on his right foot with right hand raised.

Trumpeter said. "Chief of Half-moons, such a gift is not welcome in the Convention. Take it away. If you want to offer it to Brother Beaver, wait till afterward." The Chief moved off and made as if to throw the skeleton away. "Farther!" He dropped it carelessly, all the way outside the crowded arena.

Trumpeter noted the spot and went on with business. Late that night, unseen, he and Emelas found the skeleton. It turned out to be practically

complete, and quite fit for trans-substantiation into the Mother of Fishers.

They said nothing about it through another tense winter, in which the complaints about shortage of hunters were vocal and bitter in the village. They said nothing until the wild rain was falling which signaled the new year. Then Yanils, becoming Feather, revealed that in the next three nights nine new men would be made. The relief was almost hysterical. On the strength of this, and of the last of the Commencement frenzy, Feather got away with passing his headdress and name to his son, in front of all the men. The ceremony for this, which the two had composed and rehearsed, was recognized as wholly authentic.

In the general exultation, they were the only two who were not sure of a good fishing year. Even they hoped, when after a month, one day finally the signs were right. Everyone watched the new Feather paddle out from shore and north along the coast. And again half a month later when he put out again. He returned this time to become Trumpeter – but a Trumpeter of a *Lame Year*. He stood crest down in the gentle surf, and there was no need to wait for the Fishers to gather for the chant, most of them were already there.

The next day the Assembly heard what he and Yanils proposed to restore the Fishers' standing among the people. Beside offering girls in marriage to the other tribes, they would offer girls and young men in service, on the understanding that these would remain Fishers, and return after two years. The scheme was well worked out (it had to be, for it was not feasible to submit something like this to the men for amendment). Each loaned Fisher would bear a fish-shaped scar on his upper arm, as a reminder of his allegiance. To avoid the scar being taken as a brand of inferiority, the Trumpeter and his father proudly displayed the wounds newly cut on their own arms: *all* Fishers henceforth would have them.

Yanils was glad his son had replaced him for this venture. In the first place, the young man was a more impressive Trumpeter, with his dark, wide eyes and his head held high. And then, they seemed to have more authority this way: the authority of wisdom and the authority of a powerful name inhered in two different men, who agreed.

The young man was aware he was taking more of the risk in case the plan failed. He was willing.

Yanils helped to get the Fishers' unquestioning support for the scheme. At Convention, questions would be raised, by men skeptical of all Fisher names. Yanils left it entirely up to his son.

The young Trumpeter spoke nobly of the pleasure he would take in granting so generous a gift as he was about to reveal; there was no lack of

confidence in his manner; indeed Yanils, listening, was afraid he was antagonizing them by his haughtiness. When Trumpeter set forth the offer, however, the Chief of Badgers greeted it with frank gratitude. After that, even if the other tribes had not taken a single servant, the Fishers would have been back in good standing in the exchange. In fact every tribe took some.

This was the way the Fishers lived for many years. Yanils could not see that the quality of the nets declined; but they got no use except for a few little river fish to eke out the Convention feast. Rafts, with a floor of thin poles lashed over three dugout floats, were in repair and waiting each spring; but they were never used. The worry of finding a bass skeleton for Commencement recurred. Some years the secret ocean fishing was successful. There were fresh-water bass in the Half-moon Lake and in the River, it turned out. If Yanils and Emelas had known they were getting fresh-water bass from the Chief of Half-moons, they might have shrunk from making the substitution; but by the time they noticed the difference, it had proved its efficacy in the initiation. Though the Chief of Half-moons never repeated his insulting offer, a young Fisher once brought back a bass, still dripping, when he returned from service to the Half-moons. A round-headed stranger, whom Yanils took into his confidence, for several years secretly brought bass caught in the River; since he was not one of the people, it was permissible, and Yanils paid well; but then he stopped coming. Most of the Fisher men never asked themselves where Feather got the body of the Mother of Fishers.

The Fishers were prosperous. Grateful for the servants, the other tribes were generous. The returning servants were strange, and sometimes annoying to the Chief. They brought back new and sometimes confused ideas of how to hunt, how to make baskets, how to make love. They might not endorse the ideas, but they felt magnified by having them to report.

Yanils and Emelas intended Emelas's son Artals to continue the dynasty, and put him through the preliminaries – manhood, unsuccessful challenge, and apprenticeship – at an early age. Even before that, Emelas had begun telling him the secret epic of the achievements of Yanils. He had time to include many little problems as well as the large ones, and all were told and re-told. His account was impressive and dramatic; it was also scrupulously accurate, and represented Yanils winning by discovering a strategy which would win, while other strategies would have lost. It was the only legend among the Fishers which was of this kind. Artals also (this Emelas did not think of) heard the rational solutions before he could see

the complexity of the problems which implied them; he heard the breaks with tradition praised before he knew the tradition or the force it had among the people. Hearing an episode told just as Emelas saw it, he did not see it like Emelas, though he tried. One thing was transmitted intact: admiration for Yanils.

Emelas died of a fever one spring. Yanils handed over the symbols of office to Artals. The old man was suffering more grief than was proper, and concealing it, which made him impatient and off-hand about the transformation of Artals. (To every previous owner of the names, the transformation had been momentous.) Then Yanils took over the coaching.

His pupil, he concluded quickly, was a dense one. Yanils may have been too old to relish aggressiveness like his own in a youngster, or too far past the years when he and Emelas had developed the new ways to remember how uncertain they had been. The main thing was this: Artals reminded him of Emelas and was not. He looked like his father; also, since his mother had been expelled from the household, Yanils could talk freely with him all day, just as with Emelas when he was a bachelor. So whenever Artals reacted to any passing matter differently from what Emelas would have done, Yanils was disappointed. He didn't show contempt, but he showed his disappointment. To Artals the difficulty of pleasing the old man reinforced his veneration.

"What are you doing telling your friends how we choose who goes into service?" he nagged one winter as they inspected nets.

"I don't tell all my friends, grandfather. Just Omas and Yeters, who are eligible to take my names. Somebody has to be ready in case I die. You wouldn't want the names back, would you?"

"I'll be dead before you. Teach those two what the Feather and Trumpeter *have* to do. Don't teach them things which aren't in the ancient rules. Don't teach them our ways. I suppose next you'll be telling them where we got the body of the Mother of Fishers."

Artals was startled. "Why not, grandfather? That is part of the job now. What would you want the new Feather to do – make no new men until there was another good fishing year?" An unlikely event, his tone emphasized.

The old man had no answer. Artals puzzled over his meaning, but within a couple of months gave up. To the extent that he understood, he obeyed.

Yanils, now the oldest man in the tribe, died shortly after.

For a long time his directing hand was not missed. Artals took a wife and

raised children. He was not carefree, indeed he was not in any way a very happy man. But he did not feel during these years that the fate of the Fishers hung on him as it had on Yanils. As he did not aspire to supplant Yanils's legend, which he quietly spread, so he did not aspire to supplant Yanils's judgment. His authority extended essentially only over initiating men and playing host at Convention; aside from that, he was not very different from other Fishers.

Then suddenly one night he was pressed into the role of sage. Something happened to him which had never happened to Yanils: the Chief appealed to him. He came one rainy autumn night, wearing his dress cape. Artals's wife and two younger children were sleeping in the house, and the door was shut against the weather, so the two men had to stand with their heads in the smoky top of the house and take counsel in whispers, deepening the strangeness of the situation.

The problem was one which had been discussed generally among the men (except the Chief, who did not chat). The young bachelors who had returned from service during the last few years were an unruly bunch. There were not enough wives to go around, and they were bored. They had had two years apiece of doing their neighbors' work without thanks; they knew their neighbors' customs and territories; and they had taken up celebrating their emancipation by sneak raids on the other tribes. These had been few and petty enough so far that dignity would not allow punishing them. What would happen if they continued? The men shook their heads and speculated. If they had sons or brothers who were involved, they tried to caution them. But risk was welcome to the bachelors.

It seemed the problem was up to the Chief, who was ruler of all legitimate forays outside the village. At the same time, Trumpeter was, even more than the Chief, the Fishers' diplomat, and besides, Artals was heir of Emelas, heir of Yanils; so the Chief had come to him. In all due gravity, not pleading or ordering, the Chief set forth the problem. He stated all names and details he knew. When he had done with the statement of facts, he took up the causes – ending with this one:

"The young men do not follow the Customs. They know it is the custom to respect the other people. They know it is the custom to make gifts to them, to give them corn and give them service, in pride, and take their gifts in pride. They say that Yanils taught that all customs may be broken. When they cross Benwal into Badger territory, something Yanils never did, they say this is Yanilism."

The coined word meaning "Yanilism", or perhaps "skepticism", was compounded "Yanils-scar-headress". Artals had heard it before, especially

from his brash, round-faced son Okteis. Okteis, though a man, had not been in service, and was not known to have raided. Still it was true that he talked like this. Artals being the extreme of unexpected frankness and the principal chronicler of Yanils's resourcefulness, Okteis had expressed these ideas more freely with him than the other bachelors had with their fathers. Even so, it was only in unintentional eavesdropping that Artals had heard Okteis's more startling suggestions: that the rafts were useless, that all years were *Lame Years*, that Yanils had kept up the ritual of looking for great schools of fish in the ocean only as an impressive show to increase the respect with which the Fishers listened to his guidance, and that if alive today Yanils would agree that such mystifications were no longer useful. Artals did not quote this to the Chief. He had not heard this still bolder conjecture of Okteis: that bass were not essential, that perch or carp from Benwal could confer manhood on a Fisher boy.

The Chief said. "The grandson of Yanils knows that Yanils would not fight with our Brother Badger. The grandson of Yanils knows that Yanils would not have Fishers running far through the woods without the Chief leading them."

Yes. There was a third reason the Chief appealed to Artals: to stop the perversion of the tradition of Yanils.

Artals stood silent a long time. He went through everything in internal dialogue with Yanils, and accepted only what he could imagine Yanils accepting. Seeing the motionless face of the Chief by the dim glow of his hearth, the sense of incongruity caught him, he lost certainty that tomorrow would be like yesterday, and he was able to evoke Yanils's imagination and confidence better than he ever had in the old man's presence. He decided.

"Chief, I own the name of Feather."

"Yes."

"I own the name of Trumpeter."

"Yes."

"Chief, I own the name of Yanils. I will take on the name of Yanils at a council of all the men which you will call. In the name of Yanils I will give the bachelors a winter raid which you will lead, which will dare our Brother Badger but not harm him, which will help the Feather and all our people."

The Chief did not answer.

Artals stated the plan: an annual attempt to net freshwater bass for the following Commencement. This meant invading the territory of either Half-moon or Badger. Because Half-moon Lake was frozen all winter and

its known fishing spots were in sight of the settlement, it would be better the first time to try the River.

The Chief did not answer.

Artals explained the problem of the Mother of Fishers carefully, assuming it was unfamiliar. He asked where bachelors would be found to go into service if there were no initiations for a few years. Okteis and a few others had not served, but they would all resent being chosen after being spared once. New bachelors were needed, hence bass were needed.

The Chief left convinced.

At the Council, the men stood solemnly in a circle as at Assembly. Artals stood at the altar. Without the dominating presence and the planned oratory Emelas would have had, his straightforward opening was unconsciously powerful.

"Chief, I own the name of Feather."

"Yes, Artals."

"I own the name of Trumpeter."

"Yes, Artals".

"Chief, I own the name of Yanils."

"Yes, Artals."

"I take the name of Yanils."

"Yes, Yanils."

The response was such that he might have successfully done what the Chief had first wanted: simply told the young men to stop their nonsense. But he stuck to the plan. There was perfect silence as he spoke about the foray, and as far as he could tell perfect agreement, until, when he was almost through, a voice broke in.

It was Yastuls, the Chief's son, a lean, heavy-browed bachelor just back from service with the Badgers. He spoke tensely: "Our people can not fish except in summer, ruled by the Trumpeter. Yanils never fished except as the Trumpeter."

Artals-Yanils knew this was false, but he also knew his grandfather had wanted it believed. He said, "Our people are the Fishers. The fish are our blood in all seasons. The fish, our Mother, waits for us."

Yastuls, with eyes wide, said, "The ocean brings the body of our Mother to the Trumpeter in the summer." If he had any support it was inarticulate, and probably among the older men. It was extraordinary for him to insist so long.

"I, Yanils. say that you are not the Trumpeter, you do not own the name of Trumpeter, and you have not been instructed in the ways of Trumpeter, since you have never challenged."

The young man had to be loyal to the authority and tradition he was appealing for. He cooperated with the rest of the preparations, even contributing a few recent reports on Badger routine.

Part of the plan was to slake the young men's thirst for suspense by protracting it. Artals waited until the first full moon after the first snow to set out. He and the Chief were the only married men along. It was the only time the name of Yanils commanded such unity.

Crossing Benwal, they continued north on foot, packing canoes and nets. They followed the shore at the foot of rock slopes and cliffs. Most of the way they would be out of sight of anyone at the top, and the muttering surf would do something to cover any noise they made.

As they passed below the Badgers' village, they listened for any sounds of activity. To their surprise, they heard low voices. Yastuls whispered to his father in anguish, "It must be their New Year!" The Chief didn't make out the words, thought he was demurring again, and hurried ahead disgusted. Yastuls hurried after, trying to get him to listen, then gave up. They were past the village now anyway.

At the River they spread three nets between canoes and the shore. They couldn't help being exposed to sight here, so they posted lookouts in a ring around the fishing. They got a pretty good haul; in a short time they took stock and found that three of the fish they had caught were suitable, so they started back. There was plenty of time to reach Benwal by day-break: the moon was a little more than halfway across the sky.

Yastuls, realizing the Badgers would be preoccupied with the most sacred part of their ceremony, decided not to try again to warn his father.

As the Fishers passed the village, the Badger men jumped them. They wounded a few Badgers with half-hearted spear-thrusts before being surrounded and disarmed. The Chief and Artals, obviously the leaders, were killed, and the young men sent home empty-handed and naked. They arrived bewildered and in pain after fording the icy stream. They were put to bed beside blazing fires, and slept through the women's wailings until midday.

They wakened healthy enough, but as dizzy with humiliation as if it was a high fever. The wailing was still going on. Nobody disturbed them until late afternoon, when the women brought them some bread and some clothes and the men came to take them to a council.

Omas had taken charge. He said a few words about the disgrace of the Fishers, so obvious that he needn't have bothered. Okteis expected the disgrace next to be concentrated on the bachelors. Nothing of the sort. Omas

went on to say that since they must have a Chief and the Chief must be chosen by challenge, there would be a challenge immediately, with the loser, if he survived, to get the trumpet and the kingfisher crest. In an ordinary challenge, if the incumbent Chief lost, he had to be killed; today this rule had no application, there being no incumbent.

The contestants would be Okteis and Yastuls.

After the first shock, Okteis decided it made sense. It was taken for granted that he would lose. That would make both Yastuls and himself succeed their fathers. Also the old men may have been so subtle as to want candidates who were bachelors, but not trouble-making raiders. Of course both he and Yastuls were technically unprepared to become Feather, but that technicality was being overlooked.

Well, all right, he thought, but what a headache it would be to work with such a traditionalist Chief as Yastuls!

Without delay Omas put into his hand the sharp wooden dagger as long as his forearm, and faced him off for the challenge. He and Yastuls circled. They were both shaky in the knees. Okteis did not feel like facing danger this afternoon. The danger was not entirely sham. Even the most perfunctory challenge had to have some resemblance to a fight. Besides, if Yastuls was thinking what a headache it would be to work with such a Yanilist Feather as Okteis, he had the option now to try to kill him.

Okteis decided that he was too weak to maintain the caution required through a long fight. He'd have to miss with one thrust, and then take the first one from Yastuls, docking it with his arm if necessary to keep it from being fatal.

He charged clumsily, all his attention on his defensive left arm, and swung his dagger in a slow sideways path that would be easy to dodge.

Yastuls didn't dodge it. He crouched to take it on the left shoulder, then dropped to the ground with the conventional cry of "Mercy, Chief of Fishers." He peered nervously at the hand he had pressed to his scratched shoulder; yes, there was a little blood, he was within his rights in quitting. He smiled tautly.

The Chief, who had been Okteis, was appalled at the completeness of his defeat. He was now Chief for life! "You have no right!" he howled, tears marking his round, childish cheeks. "You have no right to the names of Yanils!"

Yastuls, still on the ground, said, "My mother's mother was the daughter of Yanils. I will be the Feather who restores the ancient ways." His speech was stiff, as if rehearsed. "The Fishers have suffered for the sins of Artals. Now we –"

"We suffered for you – you betrayed us!" screamed the Chief. "You knew the Badgers. You knew we'd be caught!"

Now Yastuls was on his feet shouting too. "You think I wanted to lose my father? You think I wanted to be beaten by the same people who have been walking on me for two years?" His sincerity was clear, and the sympathy of the men watching swung to him. But he went on wildly, "We were punished for the sins of Artals. We will reform. We will follow the old ways and the ocean will again bring us the body of the Mother –"

He was interrupted by several of the older men. He had forgotten: it was day, and though the women were not supposed to be near the arena, they might have heard the secret name, the way he was shouting.

This small victory calmed the new Chief, and by the next day he was cheerful again and joked with his friends about old-fashioned young Yastuls. For now, the old ways were entrenched, but it was mostly the old men who supported them. In a few years Yanilism would be nearly universal. Yastuls, meanwhile, rejecting bass from unhallowed sources, would be unable to create more men: a calamity, but one which would only discredit Yastuls the faster.

The Chief had a sense of humor but also a taste for movement: he would not have waited patiently if he had not seen other problems.

Irresponsible raiding was not one of them. He did organize a second poaching trip to the River. It was successful; he presented a bass to Yastuls with plenty of witnesses, Yastuls refused to touch it and he took it away. But the problem that worried him was the Badgers.

They were taking too many girls in service, and treating the men they took too badly. Artals had given away a girl Okteis liked last year; it hadn't been tragic to him, he was not eager to marry yet, but it was fresh in his mind. All the tribes were demanding a lot, but this year the Badgers would have a special claim. There would be no new men. The Fishers would have only girls to send.

The first thing he did was to plant more corn. It meant putting men on women's work; but he explained that the extra corn was for Convention, where the other people brought meat, therefore was honorable – perhaps should properly be entirely raised by men. The crop was not what he hoped, but he looked for further improvement the next year. As it was, the Fishers were able for the first time to make appreciable gifts of corn for the others to carry home.

It was not enough. The gifts of the others were generous. He offered no men, two girls for marriage, and one girl for service. It was clearly not enough.

The Chief of Badgers raised his right hand, hopped twice, and growled, "The Fishers take, without asking, the gift of crossing our territory. Surely they mean to return large gifts for this." It was fortunate he was not free to tell the non-Badger chiefs that his rites had been interrupted.

The Chief of Fishers said quietly, "The Badgers take, without asking, the blood of our fathers."

"The Badgers offer you, beside our other gifts, three canoes – and no nets."

The other chiefs seemed to feel accounts had at least been squared by this. But they all reminded the Fishers of the traditional obligation of service. "Why do you send no men this year?"

The Chief of Fishers looked up at Trumpeter, who stood stiffly beside him. "The men are delayed by the will of the Feather."

"Who is the Feather?"

"The Feather is not here at this season. The Chief of Fishers, to show his great friendship and desire to appease his Brothers Badger, Beaver, Half-moon, and Deer, gives them a gift he has never given, by naming this mysterious name."

They were at once satisfied – especially the Badger, whose grievance of sacrilege had, in a sense, been repaid in kind.

The Chief of Fishers smiled at the Trumpeter, not in friendship but in challenge.

Yastuls could not last many more years. That winter the Chief again offered him an unblest fish carcass, and again he refused. The Chief put new effort into the corn planting, but more corn, even in quantity to make up for the reduced offers of servants, would not satisfy the demand of the Fishers themselves for new initiations.

Yastuls thought that the failure to bring the fish his first year, in spite of his rectitude, might be due to insufficient rectitude. Had the nets been made according to ancient formulas? He was not really sure. His instructions had not been from a Feather, but second-hand through Omas and other contemporaries of Artals. They were sure of the preparations for launching Feather's canoe, and of all details of Commencement, but they did not agree very well on other things. They were not at all clear, for instance, on how often the blessed Yanils had suffered *Lame Years*. Some said, never two successive *Lame Years* while Yanils was Feather; Yastuls told himself, never two successive *Lame Years* while Yanils was alive, though none of the old men was that optimistic.

The Chief and his friends watched with open amusement the daily prepa-

rations of Feather. He awaited the sunrise at the altar, lighted his fire with full ritual. North wind. He walked back home stony-faced. He watched for another sunrise. Clouds. He walked back home, his cheeks sucked in, not looking to right or left for anyone. He had no doubt of his own ability to keep this up all season, five seasons; but he doubted the Fishers would wait.

The next morning nobody troubled to watch him. The sunrise was clear, the wind gentle from the south. He launched the kingfisher effigy. It was swept away to southward! He could begin his watch for fish! Last year he had never got this far.

In the afternoon, having drifted back close to the village, he noticed there were a few Fishers watching. Were they impressed? He wasn't close enough to see their faces.

That night nobody spoke to him. If they believed in his approaching triumph they thought it better not to rush it.

The next morning the signs were all favorable again. He paddled out, and when he stopped he saw the current was bearing him rapidly southward. The sea was not choppy, but a breeze ruffled the surface. He strained his eyes in all directions. It would be easy to mistake a wavelet for the splash of a jumping fish.

Some months before, an eruption of an underwater volcano had directed the great cold current into a new channel – more strongly shoreward than ever. Today it brought the fish from the subarctic. The Feather saw hundreds leaping all around him. He sprang to his feet in the unstable canoe, in ecstasy, and flung his crest into the sea.

He was vindicated. The ways of Yanils would be preserved, and false Yanilism refuted.

Feather, his teeth chattering with triumph, ran to become Trumpeter – in the old way, a long joyful peal not heard before in his time. The Fishermen ran to the rafts, even the unmanned Chief, and Trumpeter ruled the fishing.

They worked until the rafts were glittering with their catch. Trumpeter selected the coming year's body of their Mother, held it above his head in exaltation a moment, and wrapped it up to hide it from the women.

Then they dumped the rest of the fish back into the sea and returned home, saved.

Mood Bender

Jonathan Lethem

THE man dragged his trunk to the edge of the schoolyard, and waited for the bell to ring. It was noon, the shadows elusive spots underfoot, the rest glare. He felt the heat. Now, before the kids came out, the salesman indulged his bad feeling, his insecurity and shame, in careful bounds, like a flickering rat he allowed to run a sterile maze and then imprisoned again, out of sight. This was his one chance. Nobody would be measuring his credit out here.

Across the concrete glare, another salesman lugging another trunk. Competition. SwervCo? Mano-a-Mano Enterprises? Or his own outfit, squeezing the market, pressing him? *Fuck it*, he thought angrily. Then his instincts cut in: oops.

The bell rang, the kids streamed out, the salesman opened his trunk.

The new puppets, today's line, strolled out and began showing off for the first kids that reached them. These kids were regulars. They came every day, with yesterday's puppets in hand for trade-in. Hooked. The easy part. The salesman's work came later in the lunch break, when the regulars took their new puppets and showed them off, and the salesman tried to rope in some new takers. The shy, curious ones with smaller allowances, with parents who didn't like puppets brought home every day.

The salesman's company, Desani and Sons, had created three new puppets for today. The salesman had picked them up early this morning as the weary night shift, the programmers and designers, slumped home. Out the puppets came now, reciting their pitches, previewing the adventures they'd enact that evening, if purchased. Horace the Flower Eater clumped out on his oversized elbows and knuckles, his diminutive hindquarters dangling aloft, and growled: "I'll put some punch in yer homework plans,

ye Booklubbers. Or are ye afraid to sample 'Horace's Half-Broken Hell-mobile'?"

Skittering around Horace on her unicycle wheel came K.K. Karma, craning her long neck for balance, her beaked head ducking and darting. Her voice came out computer smooth and enigmatic: "Outermost Space and the Undersea Kingdom – why not visit them both tonight? My episode's entitled 'Go-Signals From the Ostrich Woman', and it's guaranteed way-out fun." The salesman nodded appreciatively, recognizing good work. Probably Ben Iffman, the best puppet stylist in Desani's stable. Iffman's designs seemed to push buttons in the kids, especially the more mature ones, who tended to have more influence over their peers. That brought in customers. Iffman had a hotline to puberty.

Last, and least, in the salesman's judgement, came Arky Rabbit, a guitar-wielding hare with a slick pompadour between his ears. He crooned his pitch with a little rockabilly hiccup: "Well, tonight we're gonna have us a time, it's 'Arky Rabbit's Life In Crime!'"

The selling began. The regular customers first, with their trade-ins. The salesman accepted the previous day's depleted puppets, incinerating their bodies in the atomic bucket that was a part of his trunk. With a trade-in the cost of a new puppet was very low, to encourage the repeat customers, but even on a flat sale the company took a loss, measured against the cost of fabricating the product. It was in advertising that the profit was made, in either case. Clients paid Desani and Sons large figures to equip the puppets with advertising programs, aimed at the buyers' parents. The puppets delivered the ads during breaks in their adventure programs and afterwards, when the children had gone to bed but their parents were still presumably awake.

"I want Horace, Mister," said a kid, extending a lifeless trade-in on one side and his credit wristband on the other.

The salesman pressed the boy's wristband to the Desani and Sons chargebox, and the digital numbers clicked up. The boy paid four fifty for the puppet – about average. The salesman passed over a bagged Horace and the boy skipped away. The puppet would surge into life about four hours from now, and die before morning.

Next came a shy girl, who wanted the awful rabbit puppet, and when she put her wristband against the chargebox it took seven dollars from her credit. The salesman wondered if the girl had sensed his distaste for her selection, and been ashamed. Or was it some private hurt that made her wristband so vulnerable? He couldn't know. Well, it was her parents' money, he told himself. By the time she was spending her own credit she'll

have learned to control her emotions. The salesman marvelled, as he often did, at being in a position to view new consumers just feeling their way into the economy.

Most fundamentally, he experienced it as a relief from being on the other end of the process.

Across the sunsplashed schoolyard, the new competitor was at work. The salesman could see his rival's puppets dancing in front of their trunk, performing for the children who had gathered there. The fickle children. He wondered if the competitor's designs were especially good this morning. Could that explain the attempt to expand to this territory? The salesman turned back to his work, but the rat of insecurity was loose in his corridors.

One by one, the children lined up for their new puppets. It was a good morning. K.K. Karma outsold the others easily, with the pointless rabbit lagging furthest behind. The salesman knew his work, yes, and was part of a crack little team, yes, yes. He felt a little burst of pride, which chased the rat away. The salesman worked at enticing the reluctantly curious children on the fringe, the prospectives. By the time he was done he'd sold out the Karma puppet, and nearly done the same with the Flower Eater.

The salesman packed and headed for his car. Behind him the school bell rang. His shadows jumped out a little ahead of him now.

The artist had named himself after his gallery: Zigmund Figment. He dressed flamboyantly, in silk thneeds and kaleidoscarves, a work of art himself. FIGMENT showed only Figments, just as, down the Avenue, SOMBER FLUID showed only Mars Bank's work; there was no being an artist without owning a gallery, not anymore. But FIGMENT was a hit, the flavor of the hour, and Figment was rolling in it, his confidence and therefore his credit seemingly impermeable. He was a sprite, a gadfly in high society's ointment. He had quite a way with a deftly turned negative thought, for those who could afford that luxury.

The wife of the Senator from Exxon-Rhetoric was one such. She came in on the artist's arm, and starting cooing at the work on the walls.

"Yes, this is my latest stuff," Figment sighed, gesturing at the nearest, a screen display showing Figment being guillotined in revolutionary Paris, in a ten-second loop. "Don't say it, I know, it's shit and I'm all flodged up. Just be polite enough to mutter some vapid praise as you beg off and slip out never to return."

"You slay me, Zigmund," said the Senator's wife. "This is as good as anything you've ever done."

"You think so?"

"Yes. In fact, I want it. Right away."

"Then your standards must be slipping as badly as my talent. But I guess everything is subject to the same irrevocable slide into mediocrity, yes?"

"You're just trying to drive the price up, you badrapper. You're no better than a common thief at market."

The artist got out his chargebox, and took the hand of the Senator's wife, kissing it gently. "If I were a common thief at market you would ruin me," he said.

She failed to conceal her delight.

"Because of the way you thrive on abuse, you fat, ugly old power-hag," he continued, and as her smiled evaporated he pressed her credit band to his chargebox, and savaged her account.

She goggled at the digital price read, plucked her wrist away and staggered backwards.

"Thrive on abuse..." she murmured.

"Ah, but on market you must destroy them," he said soothingly. "I bet they pay you to take merchandise, and your housekeeper pays to clean your filth. It's too easy for you. That's why you collect art. You like to flirt on the edge of darkness." He took the screen off the wall.

She pursed her lips. "I do like that. Yes."

"I've got what you need," he said.

"Yes."

He handed her the screen. His head fell into the basket: lop, lop, lop. "You'll like having this on your wall now, I think."

She suddenly giggled. "You pig, you dog." She took it, then reached up and ruffled his hair. "Yes. You evil man." She held her acquisition out, and a complex series of expressions played over her face as she examined it, ending in a little head-shaking smile. "What's next, Zigmund? Where from here?"

"You mean how can I sink any lower than these current bottom scrapings? I think I might work with puppets."

"Puppets?"

"You know, those banal commercial narrative dolls, the kid toys." He'd picked the stupidest idea he could think of and blurted it out, but already he sensed that he might be more sincere than he was admitting to himself. There could be something there.

"Dynamite, fantastic," she gushed.

A week later the salesman was driving back to Desani and Sons from the schoolyard when he saw lights flashing in his rearview mirror. Police, waving him over.

The competition at the schoolyard had turned into a regular thing. Swervco had targeted his beat, and siphoned off some of his customers. Work left him dangerously down at the moment, and so he'd been listening to an inspirational tape in the car.

And, apparently, speeding.

As the cop walked up the salesman cranked the tape up louder, trying to pretend it wasn't happening. He couldn't afford this. The trumpets surged, but instead of lifting him higher, they seemed to crush him under their weight.

"License and astrological chart please."

"Astro – I thought the biorhythm police had the rights to this precinct." But of course the salesman had his mandatory birth chart in his wallet somewhere. He fished it out and turned it over.

"Nope, we won the contract. Better results than the biorhythm guys. Let's see, house in Mars, that's no excuse."

"How fast was I going?"

"Fifty. Credit please."

The Salesman extended his wrist, thinking desperately: *I go fast, I'm my own man, a wild guy, a trouble maker*. But instead of inflating his mood it reminded him of a puppet's spiel. Foot-high rebel in his foot-high car, tooling around the schoolyard. The cop pressed the summons book to his credit band and extracted a wallop sum.

There was a puppet salesman/there was a salesman puppet, the salesman thought, as the cop drove off. How little difference it made.

Back at Desani and Sons, he opened his trunk and unloaded the day's unsold puppets at the materials desk, and turned his chargebox over to the accountant. The incident with the cop had him down, and he took an unusually low commission. Shrugging it off, he went in to the main office. There the younger Desani stood talking to a man in crushed-foil tails and a kalleidoscarf.

The salesman quickly turned to leave, but Desani caught his eye and nodded him over. "Mr. Figment, allow me to present Pete Flost, our lead salesman. Pete, Z. Figment."

The salesman offered Figment a tight smile, then turned to Desani. "Can I see you alone for a moment?"

"Excuse us, Mr. Figment," said Desani. They went off into Desani's office.

"I don't think Desani and Sons should have anything to do with this person," said the salesman. "It's a strong intuition – don't ask me to justify it. I can't."

"Don't be foolish. He's an important artist. I'm surprised you don't recognize his name –"

"You did?"

"No, but just listen. He's rich, and he wants to work with us. This could be important. We can't afford to be rude."

Desani licked his lips. The salesman could see he had his credit up about this. "Okay. What exactly does he want?"

Desani shrugged. "It's not completely clear. He wants to work with puppets. The publicity could be immense. I want you to talk to him."

"Me?"

"You're supposed to represent the company, yes? It's an order. Go."

The salesman took a deep breath and went out, extending his hand to Figment.

"Had lunch yet?" said the artist. The salesman saw Desani standing to one side, nodding silent encouragement.

"Yes, I mean *no*."

Cold Heaven was an exclusive spot: for those without a reservation it offered suspended animation to ease the inconvenience of the three-day wait for a table. The salesman had never dreamed of eating there, but Figment seemed to know the Maitre d', and they were ushered straight in.

"What, uh, brought you to Desani and Sons?" said the salesman, after they'd ordered. "If you don't mind –"

"Random," said the artist. "Completely."

"I mean, why puppets? What's your – interest?"

"Novelty. Banality. Mass culture. Gross insult. I'm looking for a medium that metaphorizes the temporal, presold, infantilizing, reflexive qualities of contemporary artistic expression, my own especially." He lifted his wineglass and leaned over the table. "Puppets, Mr. Flost, are naive perfection. They say more than I could ever hope to."

"They're children's toys," said the salesman, trying to square himself in his reality. "They're a *medium*, if I understand the word, mainly for advertising."

"Fine, great – they'll still be all that. That's just what I like, that's just what I'm after."

"Look, Mr. Figment, excuse my rudeness, but what makes you think your experience as an artist qualifies you to program puppets? Your work is far superior, I'm sure, but the specific skills –"

"No, please, I wouldn't dream of doing it myself. I want *your* programmers, I want it to be exactly as slick and corny as the very best or worst they can do, please. I *never* execute my own work. Gosh. They'll just work

according to my instructions, and if they get it wrong or ignore me completely that's probably better anyway."

"And then we sell them... like we always do?" The salesman was confused.

"Now there you go, you've put your finger on the difference, Flost. We do not. We sell them to *my* clientele, for thousands of times what you ordinarily charge."

At that moment the food arrived, and the salesman was thrust back into awareness of his surroundings. The splendor of *Cold Heaven*, the murmur of conversation from neighboring tables, and now the dishes arrayed on the table before them. The salesman felt suddenly, in the magnanimity and ease with which Figment had plucked him up and deposited him in this impossible setting, a sense of the artist's power, his credit. It was a glimpse that could crush the salesman or lift him up. He had to grab on and cope, had to manage the chance. For himself and Desani and Sons. Or maybe just for himself.

"You don't happen to need a salesman, at your gallery? Because I'm very good, really, at what I do, I should be selling something other than puppets to schoolkids. I could pick up art selling, I'm sure --"

"My kind of selling is a different thing," said Figment bemusedly. "Besides, I like you as you are."

"Don't patronize me," said the salesman abruptly, surprising himself. He involuntarily moved his hand to cover his wrist, as though fearing that the waiter would catch him at this terrible low in mood and charge him for the meal. As though it were all some complicated scam.

"Listen, I'm sorry," said the artist. "Don't misunderstand. What I do, it's no better than anything else. It's meaningless garbage, twitchings in the void --"

"You're not making me feel any better," said the salesman. "You shouldn't talk like that."

"What I like about you, what you do, is that it's, you're, *real*. I don't mean the puppets, I know they're not. But the doing of it, the way you go out there and work, with your trunk full of new designs, the way Desani and Sons is like a workshop, a *guild*. Like artisans. And the way what you do, the puppets, is built into the culture. It's a mode that's been lost to art."

This was something the salesman could safely consider, however odd. "Well, don't forget that the advertising money makes it all run. We're just sneaking commercials into the parents' living rooms."

"Even the artisan's workshop is dependent on the king's patronage," said Figment. "Let's eat, Flost."

But the first thing the artist tasted he spat back into his napkin vent. "Waiter!" The salesman watched in horror as Figment sent the dish back to the kitchen.

"Tasted like the vegetables had been in suspended animation," said Figment, when the waiter left. "Fucking place is overrated."

"I'm sorry," said the salesman, bewildered.

"You should always send something back, anyway," said Figment. "It's a game, the whole thing is a game. Watch."

The chef appeared, to apologize. Figment was surly with him. The salesman gulped his food, wanting to leave. Figment barely ate. A special dessert was presented, and Figment said he was full.

"We should have gone to a drivethru for a Gnairburger and a Fazz," Figment said in a loud, despairing voice, as the terrified waiter made his final approach, with the bill. "We could have eaten them in the parking lot of this place, while watching the doomed march in to their fates."

The waiter held the bill out, and Figment touched his credit band to it, not even looking. But the salesman watched. The digital numbers clicked up: five forty.

Incredible. All Figment had done was badrap, and the bill at *Cold Heaven* came to five forty.

About the price the salesman would expect to pay for Gnairburgers and Fazz for two.

The artist took Flost drinking, at a bar neither of them knew.

"I guess one of the reasons we don't ordinarily have serious interest in puppet design is that it's such a *transitory* thing," Flost spoke guardedly, as though fearing a trick. "You know, the puppets pretty much just self-destruct. And the kids want new characters every day."

"A lot of my stuff self-destructs," said the artist cheerily.

"What, uh, kind of work *do* you do?"

"I work in a lot of different formats, but it usually boils down to self-indulgent autobiographical narcissism. Or rank effrontery. Me in an oil painting picking my face in the mirror. Me in a video assassinated in Dallas instead of Kennedy, then rising up to heaven to be greeted by Elvis. Kinex suits programmed to simulate the experience of sex with me, and with a soundtrack of me whispering insults in your ear. Lots of wallscreens of me playing various important roles –"

The salesman took a long drink. "So you would mean puppets – of you."

"I suppose so," sighed the artist. "But maybe a variety would be better. We could do me and some other people. Real people, instead of charac-

ters. I'm boring by now, I'm practically a fictional character already, a cartoon. But someone real – that would be an interesting puppet. Something my collectors hadn't seen. Someone real – like you."

"No."

"What? It's a great idea."

"No, it's horrible. It's exactly like this terrible vision I had earlier today, a very costly one, in fact." The salesman hurriedly finished his drink.

"But think of it. They'll pay, huge amounts, to invite you into their houses. Not some fictional adventurer, but you –"

"Who they wouldn't dream of inviting in the flesh," said the salesman bitterly.

"Here, wait." The artist took both their glasses back to the bar. The cost was twice that of the first round. The artist raised his eyebrows, then shrugged and forgot about it. He was diverted by his new idea. It was the first time he'd surprised himself in years.

But he had to work carefully to keep Flost's trust, that was clear.

"Not you, then," he said, when he sat back down. "I'll find some other real persons – or make them up. But I need Desani and Sons to execute my plans."

"Well, I suppose that's fine. You're the artist. I wouldn't want to have to sell them."

"But we'll work together."

"I'll tell the Desanis I think we should go ahead."

"I want you to work with me, be my liaison."

"No thanks," said Flost, knocking back his drink. "I've got puppets to sell."

The salesman slumped back dejectedly to his car for the fifth day in a row. He wasn't selling. Swervco was winning the schoolyard away from him, away from Desani and Sons. He didn't know whether to blame it on the designs, or himself.

Figment had leased Ben Iffman, the salesman's favorite designer. It wasn't that Iffman's designs necessarily sold more than anyone else's, but handling them *meant* something to the salesman. He and Iffman were friends, partners; he took Iffman's stuff to the front line, made it perform. It didn't feel the same without Iffman's stuff in the trunk.

But he knew to blame himself. Just when he needed to crank it up, with Swervco making the inroad, he'd faltered.

To top it off, his mood was way down, the rats running wild in his maze; everything cost him a bundle. It was no laughing matter. His credit was

almost gone. He needed the commissions Desani and Sons' accountant charged into his account from the day's take, and with sales down the sums were paltry. Plus his mood kept cutting down his profit percentage; the rats got you coming and going.

Bad thoughts. He blamed it, somewhat obscurely, on Figment. But blaming was another bad thought, so he kept nudging it away. Who was Figment to damage his mood? It was stupid. So he put on his personalized inspirational headphones, to listen to a chorus of maidens calling, "Flost, Flost..." and cued up behind a line of cars at the drive-window to pick up a euphoric-laden GnairburgerPlus.

He took the steaming, grease-stained bag into his car, and then, just as he reached his wrist out to pay, he thought he heard the ethereal voices on his tape murmur: "Fucking loser..." The burger cost him his day's profit at the schoolyard, unless the chemicals in it won him an unusually high percentage on commission.

He went through the routine at the office in a trance, willing himself to submit to the burger's effects. But the younger Desani caught his arm as he ducked into his cubicle. "Can I have a word with you, Pete?"

They went into Desani's office.

"You're not handling this Swervco thing," said Desani. "Maybe you need a break."

"It's not that. I just – when do we get Iffman back? That would give sales a boost."

Desani shook his head.

"What?"

"Iffman's discovered he wants to be an artist," said Desani. "Figment showed him a glimpse of the high-life, and it did good things for Iffman's credit, I guess. He went and bought himself a gallery. We're suing him now for rights to some of the characters; we own the copyrights on the work he did for us."

"He's selling puppets? To wealthy people? Using our designs?"

"The puppets he's selling – for thousands – bear a suspicious resemblance, yes. He's got one just like 'Sweeney the Cyclone Rider' – remember him? – except he's calling him 'Octavo' –"

"People – want them? Rich people?"

Desani shrugged. "It's a vogue. Be gone tomorrow. Then maybe he'll be back. Or maybe he'll live like Figment, the crazy life, an artist. Always coming up with something new. Great life, I guess, if your credit can take it –"

The salesman shook his head. The false, burger-induced optimism jarred badly with the news. "So Figment's doing well?" he asked. "His idea

was good?"

"I don't know. Iffman's all over ArtChannel. Figment I haven't heard from. I think his stuff's still cooking up."

The salesman just stared.

"I want you to go home," said Desani. "You're no good right now."

"I can't afford it."

"You can't afford it! Pete, every time you slouch back to this place we all go out and pay through the nose. You're bringing everybody down. Take a rest. I'll - I'll send you vacation credit."

"I'm sorry, Zigmund - oh dear, look. Why don't you let me get that?"

The artist had raised his wrist to pay for their brunch at *Cold Heaven*, and the Senator's wife was shocked at the numbers that registered on the check.

So was the artist.

"Can you erase that, please, and let me pay?" she said.

The waiter blanked the check and the Senator's wife offered her wrist instead. The artist looked away, ashamed.

What had happened to his mood? His nihilist's confidence?

"Now I'm terribly sorry, Zigmund, but the new work won't do. It's not splendid, it's not funny, it's not the pinch on the bottom I expect. It's not you."

"Listen, it's the most interesting thing I've -"

"No, I can't listen any more. I have to go. You'll call me when you've found your - esprit. Your zest for evil."

And she picked up her hat and floated out.

The artist gave her a head start, then went out to his own car, in an uncommon state of dejection. He'd ushered her from his gallery to the restaurant in an attempt to switch her attention from the work itself, the 'realistic puppets', to the beguilements of his personality. But it was a misguided attempt. She'd quickly pointed out that what he was providing in person was precisely what was missing from the art.

And then, worse, his heart had gone out of it. He hadn't even managed to keep up the stream of anti-flattery, of thrilling, decadent negativism.

It was something about the new work, he knew. Something he wasn't capturing. He'd failed. And yet, he believed in the new work, believed in it so much that when it failed he was dragged down with it.

That had never happened before. It was a dangerous precedent. He had to find a solution, had to work back to the source of the inspiration, and get it right, make it impossible to overlook. Force it down their overfed,

bejeweled throats.

Flost. The spark.

He got in his car, and in ten minutes he was at the salesman's door.

"No, no. Go away," said Flost, when he saw the artist at his door. "You're the last thing I need."

"What do you mean?"

"I lost my job. It's you. You demoralized me."

"Let me in. I'll make it up to you. I'll pay you for your time, pay you now." He held out his wrist.

"Here's your chance, right here," said the salesman, pointing at the doorway chargebox. "Pay my daily rent. I can't afford it today. It's more every time, and it's breaking me."

The artist paid. He didn't say how badly it damaged his own coffers to do so. "Now – can I come in?"

The salesman gave way.

"Forget your job," said the artist. "I'll pay you for the, uh, copyright to your life. I need to base the puppet on you. I'll pay you to stay at home, okay?"

"I'm already staying home. My mood is too bad to go out paying for things."

"Well, relax. As soon as I get this right we'll both be flush. I promise. You're the point of inspiration. They'll sell."

Flost looked at him suspiciously. "Your work isn't selling?"

"The first set of puppets were a bit of a flodge," admitted the artist. "That's because I was forgetting about *you*. I mean, the specific you, not some vague gesture. This is good, my seeing your *place*. I want to borrow your reality, Flost, and I'll pay. Because it *says* something. I want to turn it into art and plop it into view."

"Look," said Flost. "I thought you were aiming at some kind of decadence effect. With the puppets, the transitory, commercial thing."

"But that's just it, it's the *juxtaposition* of the *form*, the presold, caricatured, world of the puppets, with the *content* of the most realistic, banal –"

"Please, enough. I get it."

"– and it's just that it has to be intensely specific. The details have to be perfect, they have to feel lifelike. I want to get it right."

"The righter you get it," said Flost, "the less anyone is going to want to pay for the privilege of seeing it."

"Now you're just badrapping," said the artist, laughing. "What do you want to do that to me for, to your mealticket?" He pulled a palm-sized camera out of his plastoid turban and began snapping pictures.

When he left he drove his car to a dealership, and got enough credit for it to cover another few days expenses at the gallery.

A week later, hunger drove the salesman out, though he knew that he wouldn't have enough credit to pay his rent and get back inside.

He walked downtown to Desani and Sons.

"No, no, no," said the younger Desani. "We don't need you hanging around here. We're working hard. We're hard working people. Credit is hard to come by."

"I need another chance."

"No. People are sensitive to the sight of someone like you around here. It's hard enough. No sir."

"Just front me a trunk of puppets. I'll sell them."

"You sold your trunk back to the company."

"I'll earn it back in a day. Just give me the chance."

"No. If you come here with credit enough I'll sell you a trunk, and you can peddle your way back. If you think you can. But I'm not fronting you." He frowned. "Besides, look at yourself."

"I need a meal, Desani."

"Oh, for God's sake." Desani looked nervously around. "Come on." He took his hat and led the salesman out of the office. "Nobody needs to see you here, that's not going to do them any good. Come on. I'll buy you something, then you move on."

At the restaurant Desani put up his wrist for a Gnairburger, then sat and looked disapproving while the salesman wolfed it down.

"Has Figment been around the office?" the salesman asked.

Desani shook his head. "I don't let him. He cost me you and Iffman both." He looked at his wrist. "And who knows how much in mood."

"Was he asking about me?"

"Maybe. Listen, don't depend on Figment. I don't think he's doing so good now."

"What do you mean?"

"I think he was a guy running out of inspiration when he located us, you understand? He puts on a big show with all that gaudy garb, but I think he might have been about dry already. I think we were his last chance."

"Don't say this, you don't understand what you're saying. Figment is *my* last chance."

Desani spread his hands helplessly. "I don't want to hear any more about this. Please." He got up. "Goodbye, Flost."

The salesman left the restaurant and walked across town, to gallery row.

He found FIGMENT, but the doors were closed. More than closed; they were nailed shut with boards.

Down the street was VICIOUS PARALLELOGRAM, Ben Iffman's gallery. The salesman went in. The room was full of stilled puppets, some of which the salesman thought he recognized. Iffman came out of the back, dressed in a gold lame radiation suit and wearing a wicker cornucopia as a hat. He saw the salesman and said: "Hello, Pete."

"Hello, Ben. Nice, uh, nice place you got here."

"Thanks."

"I'm looking for Figment. Have you seen him?"

"He disappeared, Pete. Lost his gallery and nobody on the row has seen him since."

"Ah."

"Things sure do move fast in a mood-based economy," said Iffman. He said it with an air of perfect equanimity, neither gloating nor maudlin.

"That they do," said the salesman, and there was a brief silence. Then the salesman said: "You don't need someone around here, by any chance? We used to make a pretty good team."

"Sorry, Pete."

"I've moved a puppet or two in my day."

"This is a different kind of thing," said Iffman. "You understand."

Two days later a technician at *Cold Heaven* woke the artist out of suspended animation. "Sir," he said, "your table is ready."

"Thanks," said the artist. He stepped out of the booth and took a few minutes in the rest room to shake off the cobwebs of stasis. Then he slipped out the back.

He didn't have credit enough for a table. He'd used the suspended animation the way a bum heaves a brick through a window to get a night of sleep in jail. He'd gone in hungry, exhausted and hopeless, at mood's end.

He emerged exactly the same, due to the nature of suspended animation. Out of options, he started walking towards the neglected part of the city, seeking a place he'd heard of, where he might find a free meal.

The artist had figured out his mistake. The same quality of attention he ordinarily applied to himself, and which in that case took the form of *irony*, had been transmuted into *empathy* when turned outward and applied to the salesman Flost.

In each case the expression was appropriate to the subject. The artist had managed to remain faithful to his method while betraying his audience's expectations utterly. He could hardly expect consumers of irony to

suddenly convert to a diet of empathy. It was a fatal miscalculation.

He went down crumbling stairs to the church basement, under a sign that read *WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD... Mon-Sat 1-4 P.M.* Inside sat a motley group of men and women sitting in classroom chairs in various postures of discouragement. At the front, lecturing them, was a televangelist, an old battered one, its chrome robot body dingy and pocked, its television head flickering and staticky. The broadcast personality was a gentle, aging priest, who spoke with a slight Scotch burr.

"You're here because you've been indulging. You may not think of it that way, but it's true; worse than strong drink –" The priest's head flickered and was replaced by an FBI copyright warning, but the voice went on. "– the Hell we make in our heads makes in turn a Hell around us." The robot body shook a stern aluminum finger. "Who here can say he has not badspoken to drag his brother down? Did you not find that the worm, once unleashed, turned and gnawed at your soul as well?"

Sitting near the back was the salesman, Flost. The artist went and took the empty seat beside him, and said: "When do we eat?"

The salesman spoke quietly, without turning. "We have to listen for a while before it gives us food. They use a televangelist because we're so depressing; nobody with any credit-sensitivity wants to come anywhere near us." Then he looked up, and saw the artist. "Oh," he said. "It's you."

"None other."

"Are you here to give me a credit infusion? It's going to take a lot. I can't take a walk around the block without paying a month's salary. What *used* to be a month's salary."

"I'm here for a meal."

"Ah. I take it the Flost puppet wasn't a big hit."

"I crashed before I even got it produced. Nobody liked the new direction in my work."

"Well, now what?"

"How about this: a roomful of realistic puppets sitting doing nothing, listening to a televangelist robot puppet mouth platitudes. Could be big."

"It's like you're wired backwards," said the salesman, not bitterly. "Bleakness, nihilism – they exhilarate you. Genuinely improve your mood. When you badrap, you get somewhere yourself. You lift yourself up by your own bootstraps."

"I guess. But I blew it. I tried to expand my vision. I ended up destroying both of our moods."

A woman in the row ahead of them turned, scowling, and said: "Shhhh!"

"Let's get out of here," said the artist.

Flost nodded.

"Everybody sing," said the televangelist up front. "When you go through life make this your goal/watch the donut, not the hole!"

The next day, at noon, they stumbled along the sidewalk near the schoolyard. They'd been drinking; somehow they'd found credit enough for a series of bottles.

There was Swervco's salesman with his trunk, and Desani and Sons' replacement salesman, Jim Travic. The two stood poised in the sun, trunks full of ready product, ignoring each other. And they ignored the salesman and the artist when they arrived.

The bell rang. The children flooded over the pavement.

The artist and the salesman lurched into the yard.

"Hey kids," said the artist. "Cavorting clown-man is here to liven up your evening hours." He waved his arms madly and marched in a figure eight. "Uh, take me home and I'll enact "Mr. Figment's Action Vacation, a Product of His Own Imagination!"

The children backed away, forming a circle. Taking a deep breath, the salesman launched himself forward.

"Remember me?" he said. "Now I'm the Man Without A Product, the Trunkless One."

The artist called out: "Rebel Without A Portfolio!"

The salesman nodded and bowed, and nearly fell on his face. "My episode's called: "Say Goodbye to Mr. Flost, Knowing Him Was Too Much Cost!"

— Special thanks to Rich Doyle

Planet Virt

Katherine MacLean

RALPH was running along the edge of a beach.

Unfamiliar birds took flight as he approached and wheeled with horn-like sounds. His fish traps were still set and perhaps some held fish, but he did not wade out to look at them. Today he wanted meat.

He picked up his club and took his new trail inland to dense woods. In the densest woods tall trees stood like pillars, and between them the ground was clear and carpeted with reddish brown pine needles. Ahead, a wide meadow of sunlight shone in greens and the colors of flowers where the alien thickets of flowers and thorns and berries and fruits grew. He turned away from it, took a different trail.

He saw another man running towards him wearing only shorts and an uneven sunburn. Almost chest to chest they stopped. "What do you want?" Ralph demanded.

"I don't want anything. What do you want?"

"You're not a girl."

"Neither are you. Who wrote this stupid script?"

They each made a peculiar sequence of finger movements at each other. Nothing happened. Neither one vanished. They had made the back-up-and-edit finger control motions. It could usually change an unsatisfactory script to an alternate line of story or at least back up ten minutes and give you another chance to decide what to do.

The new man was indignant. "You can't edit me. I'm a live player."

"I'm a live player too. But I don't know what we're supposed to play. If this is a planet landing training sim maybe we're supposed to help each other locate a good city site and set up water and food supplies."

"That's too easy. Too much food and water around. Maybe we're sup-

posed to compete. See who can set up a house and a food supply the first. I'm finding my own food. Fish and eggs are easy. This time they even let me eat and make me feel full when I've eaten."

"I noticed that too. I like it, but being full means you can't keep on eating."

"I'm building a cabin," said the new man proudly. He scratched at his sunburn and winced.

Ralph felt the new man was boasting. "I already finished a tent. Weather's too good for a house."

"Weather can change. You're going to flunk this sim. When it starts snowing, you'll be crying to them to let you out of the game booth and open the door."

They scowled at each other and both made the same finger motion at each other again. Neither one disappeared. Ralph growled, "This is my sim. This game can go fine with one player. Why don't you just take an alternate story line and get out?"

"What is this, a social skills test? Am I stuck with no story line controls and some kind of hysterical creep I'm supposed to calm down?" The new man looked at the sky plaintively.

Ralph felt enraged and tried to be calm to prove the creep was wrong about him. "I'm not going for your throat, am I? I'm not a problem, I'm a player."

"If you're not the problem, you're real. That means we're both supposed to get together and solve some kind of problem that the scriptwriter is going to spring on us."

They turned back to back and looked around nervously, gripping their clubs. The new man said, "Every so often I get a weird feeling that this is reality. At the beginning of this sim they told us we had found a planet and landed."

"Don't pay attention to that junk. Lots of sims begin with landing on a planet."

"But when we were landing they said it was real!"

Ralph felt nervous and tried to reassure him. "They say that in sims just to get us on our toes."

"But when we cook something we can eat it, and we feel full. You said it too."

"That's just some new technology they worked up for us."

"They said reality is tough, when you get damaged, you stay damaged."

"That's just some brainwash from their toughening up games. How do you know there is a reality? Maybe it's all virt."

"In my annual reality sim I fell on broken branches and got a broken leg

and wounds. I'd strayed from my sim team. I was alone. Electronic pain is no fun. Nobody came when I yelled. My leg rotted. In that sim I even died! They scripted pain at my leg until I was glad when I died and the game was over and I got a minus score. I took my next training sim in how to set bones and bandage cuts. If they put me back in that reality game they won't catch me that way again."

"If you flunked your last reality sim, maybe this is a reality sim. Scratches hurt."

"Sim pain. If they are after us to teach us a reality lesson they'd be trying to get us into sim pain. They probably have lions in this planet. Or something to make it painful."

The two men stood back to back, nervously gripping their clubs and scanning the bushes. Ralph said, "I didn't see any lions. We need weapons. Did you make any weapons?"

"Maybe we should go back to the spaceship and ask for weapons. Did you keep track of where you were going when you left the ship? I was just having fun running in the outdoor virt. I didn't look back."

"The first day I thought it was just a landscape virt. I ran around enjoying the views. I didn't watch which way I explored." Ralph tried to remember whether he had run with the sun in his eyes, or behind him. North or south?

A very large animal with long teeth and claws came out from the trees and crouched, staring at them. They climbed a nearby tree, clawing through dead lower branches to high secure branches. "Are you scared?"

"No. This can't be a reality sim. We only get them once a year before our birthdays to toughen us up."

"Then if that thing ate us there wouldn't be any pain?"

"My birthday was six months ago. When was your birthday?"

"Last week. We should be safe. We could get down and let it eat us and the game would be over with us getting minus scores but anyhow out of this stinking game."

They both stayed in the tree. "It wasn't stinking until I met you. I was having fun."

"I DIDN'T SCRIPT THE ANIMAL INTO THE GAME! Maybe there are other players in this game. Maybe they got eaten by the animal."

"It's trying to climb the tree!"

They both made finger gestures at the animal, trying to edit it out of the picture.

Ralph continued to make finger gestures at the animal long after it had finished eating the other player. After the animal ambled away Ralph continued making finger gestures at the body.

The Servant Problem

Brian Aldiss

OF course, things aren't too bad now. Not as bad as they were, I should voc. I can't complain. Used to routine and the confines.

I only have to work a five-hour day, four days a week, so that's not so bad, like what it was when I was a little girl. I work a compondur, and I've got it set up by my transpar, in a good light. All I have to do is produce six hundred exacts a day. Well, I know it's not a lot. Carrie Climp III in the next clonex has to produce eight hundred supexacts a day.

Of course I get lonely. Can't deny that. Oh, I like the realiter, have it on most nights. Tuned to the smut band, I'm not ashamed to voc. Always take a shower after, though. We get hot water in Dup-clonex 10 three hours every day. Quite enough for all ordinary needs.

Beavis and I used to smut together. I miss him, don't I, Beav? When I was a young girl, people weren't ashamed to go together. "In love," they called it. Well, sometimes ideas die and perhaps it's for the better. Like the old notion of people living in separate "houses" to themselves. I was brought up in a house. You can't help laughing. I suppose love went out with houses. It's done away with a lot of squalor. Everything's in recyc mode here. Has to be. We've got years to go yet.

Doesn't stop me missing Beavis. We used to enjoy an old-fashioned and all. I told that to Carrie Climp once and she was real shoved. Didn't voc anything, but you could see. "It's dillies for me," she voced, "Contra-feubral." I daresay, but that's how it was in the past. Interpersonally, fridity's the straight way here.

"Go out, take your mind off things, Grace," Climp voced. "Do a corridor." She's not unfriendly. It's that visulator on her phys all the time that does it as far as I'm concerned. I do corridor occasionally but you look at

people these days and think they aren't scanning what it's all about.

Get yourself classified Zomb Category and you're looked after for life. Then you have to live in a mega-clonex with other Zombs. That's not for me. Let me tell you, Beav, I stick in here most times, conched. When I stamp my chunk and go out, I generally take ASMOV with me.

He makes such a row when he peds it, does ASMOV. I make him ped behind me. But he is company of a kind.

Beavis left me ASMOV when he went to recondition. It's a mixed costing. ASMOV was a sample of avancetech in his time, but the silver plating wears off. He stands about five feet high, almost my height. Lexi's model is four, which is better. Also plasmic, which is quieter. ASMOV moves so unpleasantly. When he peds it, you hear every click of his ankle, knee and thigh joints.

Once I apped him to the technopractor clinic. All they could voc was to advice an upgrade. There's not much you can maccy with a Mk.AM II. ASMOV already has memplants and accelerrs clamped to his head. To be honest, ASMOV's O/B. I tell him that.

"MANY YEARX HAVE I OF GOOD XERVIX TO YOU YET, GRAX," he vocs. Lenses me in a pathos mode.

"How many years is that?"

"AX MANY YEARX AX I AM XERVIX TO YOU, GRAX."

The speech facility glitches in him.

He stands by when I shower, and towels me afterwards in affect mode. When I order him to tell me a story he gacks in routine channel.

"ONX WAX A XSMALL BOY AND GIRL LIVE IN OCEAN ON PLANET. CITY MANY FATHOMX DIP. BOTH BOY AND GIRL COME TOGETHER FROM NATALIUM. BOY AND GIRL ARE FRENX AND NO SMUT BETWEEN. ALSO MAKE FRENX WITH WHAT THEY SCAN IX WHALE. BOY AND GIRL CLIMB OVER WHALE AND GO FOR RIDX XUR-HIM. BUT WHALE IX NOT MAMMAL. INXTED IX HUGE XUBWEAPON FROM CONTINENT WAR. XO ONE DAY -"

Dry and impatient, I voc ASMOV, "I tell you every time, reaccess your fiction program. Indent for upgrade. You give the point of that stupid story away too early, so when the whale splodes it's no surprise."

He vocs, "XINCE YOU KNOW THIX XTORY WELL, GRAX, WHEREVER POINT OF XTORY IX PUT IT CANNOT XURPRISE YOU. I HAVE RECITED THIX XTORY TO YOU 351 TIMEX. IT CONXIXTX OF 1266 WORDX. YOU MUXT REMEMBER THEM ALL."

His logichip annoys me. I annoy him. I voc, "I am going to sleep now, ASMOV."

I can sleep. He cannot sleep. Even this year's novdels cannot sleep, merely close their lens and pretend.

While I hang in bed, ASMOV peds it to his plug, stands rigid against the partit, shuts down. He recharges all dim out.

I'm coze, hanging there in my bedsuit. But through the night from ASMOV come many clinks and elsie-dees as his overHAW continues, checking every relay and cansion-MAR in his carapack. And always hinder that, the aircond and throb of ship as the lightyers brush past its forcers.

If you got a servant, you're never free. I know I shouldn't complain. Well, I'm not complaining. I'm only stating facts. When the andspector comes tomorrow, I shall tell him straight, if you got a servant, you're never free.

Thirty years on, all automates are up to Full Scratch. As Dawntime peds in, along prog the deckspectors. Cleaning, checking, mainting, upgring, millening, nothing skipped. All us comopondurops scanned for full eye-queue and health status in nakidity. I don't shun that, Beav, honest. Nakidity nothing to electronurses. Organs, hair, seepage – mere data to Big Bio-feed.

My Class is Servant. Of that I'm proud. Serv II's "Must Keep Cortex Okay," as old song vocs it. That's me.

I just hope andspector doesn't decide to recyle ASMOV. Then I'd be really alone. I'd even miss the WHALE XTORY.

Always the suspic they'll reclassify me as a Zomb. Once you get to voc-ing "Time was," you're on someone's O/B listing.

Maybe keep producing exacts quota you printout Alpha.

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